

# ON THE LEVEL

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## From the League of Human Dignity

### December 2021

ON THE LEVEL is the bi-monthly newsletter of the League of Human Dignity, Inc.

The League of Human Dignity is a consumer-based, nonprofit organization, dedicated to promoting independent living for people with disabilities, in their own homes instead of nursing homes. To this end, we will advocate for the rights and needs of people with disabilities, while providing quality services to assist them in becoming and remaining independent citizens.

Established in 1971, the League now offers services in all 93 Nebraska counties and eight southwest Iowa counties, through our Centers for Independent Living in Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha, Nebraska, and Council Bluffs, Iowa; and our Medicaid Waiver offices in Scottsbluff, Kearney and North Platte, Nebraska.

ON THE LEVEL is available online, by email subscription, Braille and on audio CD. To subscribe in any of these formats, contact the Public Information Office in Lincoln or your nearest League of Human Dignity office. The newsletter also is archived on our website: [leagueofhumandignity.com](http://leagueofhumandignity.com)

## Season's Greetings From the League of Human Dignity

### League Employees Mark Anniversaries During 2021

During 2021, eight League of Human Dignity employees in four offices around the state observed work anniversaries, ranging from five to 20 years.

The eight have amassed a cumulative 70 years of service to people with disabilities in Nebraska.

Leading the list is Services Coordinator Meagan Bateman, who works in the League's Omaha office. Meagan reached her 20-year anniversary in July. She joined the staff of the Omaha office on July 20, 2001.

Service Coordinators work with consumers in Nebraska's Medicaid Waiver Program.

Three League employees reached the 10-year milestone. Services Coordinator Bertana "Tana" Venturino works in the Panhandle office in Scottsbluff. Tana joined the staff there on Feb. 2, 2011.

Services Coordinator Pam Glen works in the Lincoln office. Pam joined the Lincoln staff on Sept. 9, 2011.

Services Coordinator Charlie Manning also works in the Omaha office. Charlie joined the staff there on on Sept. 13, 2011.

Four employees celebrated their five-year anniversaries this year, including League Co-CEO Kathy Kay. Kathy began working in the Lincoln office on Jan. 1, 2016.

Jolene Zochol is Medicaid Waiver Supervisor in the Lincoln office. Jolene joined the League staff in that position on March 7, 2016.

Also with five years in the Lincoln office is Services Coordinator Rochelle Reese. Chelle joined the Lincoln staff in May 2016.

Catherine Cunningham in the North Platte office rounds out the year's anniversaries. Cathy joined the North Platte staff as a secretary in the spring of 2015.

Congratulations everyone!

The League of Human Dignity honors employees with length of service awards when they have been with the organization for five years, and each five years thereafter.

## Social Security to Go Up in January

Social Security recipients will be getting a raise in 2022.

About 70 million Americans will see their benefits and Supplemental Security Income payments go up starting in January, when a new 5.9 percent cost of living adjustment kicks in.

This will be the largest Social Security cost of living adjustment, COLA, in 30 years.

The Social Security Administration will mail COLA notices in December to retirement, survivors, disability beneficiaries, SSI recipients, and representative payees. Or, recipients can see their notice online, beginning in early December, using the Message Center in their My Social Security account.

January 2022 marks other changes including an increase in the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security payroll tax.

For more information about the 2022 Social Security cost of living adjustment, go online to [www.ssa.gov/cola/](http://www.ssa.gov/cola/)

## CEO's Note

As we enter November we start thinking of Thanksgiving. And then, we start to reflect upon what has been good in our lives and what we are thankful for thought out the year.

While Covid 19 is still impacting all of our lives, this Holiday season has less restrictions than last year. This year, due to immunizations, the Thanksgiving holiday held more promise of families sharing together.

- I am thankful that our agency has not lost anyone to Covid 19.
- I am thankful that I have not lost any friends or family members to Covid 19.
- I am thankful that we continue to slowly creep back into a more social world.

At our Omaha Center we had a person lose control of his vehicle and drive into our building. It caused significant damage and destroyed six offices. What is even worse is this occurred right on the heels of a major flood that has caused us to be out of the office since early August. Consequently, we are still housing our staff out of our Council Bluffs, Iowa, office. Now, these events don't really seem to be anything to be thankful for, but I am.

- I am very thankful that the accident occurred at night and no one was at the office.
- I am thankful that we have the ability to rebuild our office and even make it better than before.
- And finally, I am so thankful that staff are so dedicated and continue to cheerfully serve our consumers. The Omaha office has really bonded together and stepped up in this latest crisis and for this I am very thankful.

So, in reading this newsletter, I hope you can find things to be thankful for in your own lives. Be thankful that you have a chance of celebrating the Holidays in a very different way than last year!

## Medicare Costs Going Up Again in 2022

Medicare premiums will be going up again in 2022.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced to increase in Part A and B premiums, deductibles and coinsurance, and in the Part D income-related monthly adjustment in November.

Officials said, though, that the promised cost of living adjustment in Social Security will more than cover the hike in the Part B premium. Most people with Medicare will see a 5.9 percent increase in their Social Security benefits — the largest COLA in 30 years.

The standard Part B monthly premium will go up from \$148.50 in 2021, to \$170.10 in 2022 — an increase of \$21.60.

The increase reflects rising healthcare costs; in part makes up for limits placed on premiums during the COVID-19 pandemic; and reflects the need to maintain a contingency reserve for potential increases in health care spending and drug costs, including Alzheimer's drugs.

### Part B Deductible

A retiree who currently receives \$1,565 a in Social Security can expect to receive a net increase of \$70.40 a month after the Medicare Part B premium is deducted.

By law, the Medicare Part B monthly premium must equal 25 percent of the estimated total Part B costs for enrollees age 65 and over.

The annual deductible for Medicare Part B is increasing from \$203 in 2021 to \$233 in 2022.

Medicare Part B covers physician services, outpatient hospital services, certain home health services, durable medical equipment, and certain other medical and health services not covered by Part A. Part A covers hospitalization and some nursing home and home health care.

Part A is based on the number of quarters in which a person has paid the Medicare deduction. Only about 1 percent of Medicare recipients pay a Part A premium. The inpatient deductible is going up \$72, from \$1,484 in 2021, to \$1,556 in 2022.

## Open Enrollment

The Biden Administration is taking action to address the rapidly increasing drug costs that threaten the future of Medicare and place a burden on people with Medicare beneficiaries. Pres. Biden has proposed lowering prescription drug costs by letting Medicare negotiate drug prices.

Medicare Open Enrollment began Oct. 15 and ends Dec. 7, 2021. It is a chance for the 63 million-plus who rely on Medicare to compare coverage options like Original Medicare (Parts A and Part B) and Medicare Advantage, and choose health and prescription drug plans for 2022. For more information on the 2022 Medicare Parts A and B premiums and deductibles, visit [www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection](http://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection).

## It's Flu Season; Please Get Vaccinated

Every year, flu is responsible for millions of illnesses, tens of thousands of hospitalizations, and thousands of deaths.

If you are living with certain chronic medical conditions, you are at an even higher risk of developing serious complications from flu, like pneumonia, bronchitis, and other illnesses that can lead to hospitalization or even death. Even if your condition is well-controlled, flu can make it worse — triggering asthma attacks, increase the risk of heart disease and stroke, and make your blood sugar harder to manage.

And that's why National Influenza Vaccination Week — Dec. 5-11 this year — was established, to shine a light on the importance of vaccinations, especially for people with underlying conditions.

The most commonly reported underlying medical conditions in patients hospitalized for flu include heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and chronic lung disease. A flu shot reduces your risk of getting sick with flu. And when it does not prevent an infection, studies show it can help reduce the severity of illness and prevent complications.

As the U.S. continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever. Flu and COVID-19 together could overwhelm our medical systems. We can all do our part to reduce the spread of flu and protect our loved ones and our community from flu, saving medical resources to care for COVID-19 patients. There's still time to get a flu shot.

"Flu activity is still low right now, which means it's a good time to get vaccinated," says Dr. Dan Jernigan, Influenza Division Director at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We don't know what this season will bring, but we know that a flu vaccine can reduce the risk from flu. Part of our preparedness strategy this winter is to take flu out of the equation as much as possible. Getting a flu vaccine can help do that so there is one less thing to worry about."

Reduce your risks from flu this season. Get vaccinated now to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community. We can all fight flu. Make it your priority today -- go to [VaccineFinder.org](http://VaccineFinder.org) to find a vaccination location near you.

# Medicare Advantage Premiums Going Down

The average premium for Medicare Advantage plans will be lower in 2022, as projected enrollment in the plans continues to rise.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released the 2022 premiums, deductibles and other key information for Medicare Advantage and Part D prescription drug plans on Sept. 30.

The average premium is \$19 per month, compared to \$21.22 in 2021. The average 2022 premium for Part D coverage will be \$33 per month, compared to \$31.47 in 2021.

Enrollment in Medicare Advantage in 2022 is projected to reach 29.5 million people compared to 26.9 million in 2021. Medicare Advantage plans will continue to offer a wide range of supplemental benefits, including eyewear, hearing aids, both preventive and comprehensive dental benefits, limited access to meals, over-the-counter items, fitness benefits and worldwide emergency/urgent coverage. The percentage of plans offering special supplemental benefits for chronically ill patients will increase from 19 percent to 25 percent.

To help with their Medicare costs, low-income seniors and adults with disabilities may qualify to receive financial assistance from the Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs). The MSPs are essential to help millions of Americans access high-quality health care at a reduced cost, yet only about half of eligible people are enrolled.

For more information, including state-by-state information on Medicare Advantage and Part D in 2022, visit the CMS website, [www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov)

## Health Observances

### December

Dec. 5-11 is National Handwashing Awareness Week, Henry the Hand Foundation

Dec. 6-12 is National Influenza Vaccination Week, Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

Dec. 3 is International Day of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations

### January

January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month, Glaucoma Research Foundation

Cervical Health Awareness Month, National Cervical Cancer Coalition

Birth Defects Prevention Month, CDC

Thyroid Health Awareness Month, American Thyroid Association

# Handwashing Helps Halt Spread of Germs

December 5-11 is National Handwashing Awareness Week.

Washing your hands is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. Studies have shown that handwashing can prevent 1 in 3 diarrhea-related sicknesses and 1 in 5 respiratory infections, such as a cold or the flu.

The Life is Better with Clean Hands Campaign, started by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages adults to make clean hands a healthy habit at home and away.

Follow these five steps every time.

Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.

Lather your hands with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.

Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.

Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.

Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry.

If soap and water aren’t available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

For more information about the Life is Better with Clean Hands campaign, visit [www.cdc.gov/handwashing](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing).

# Smart Technology Makes Wheelchairs More Safe

It doesn’t take much to make a power wheelchair tip over — there are tens of thousands of accidents each year.

Nashville songwriter Barry Dean, whose daughter Katherine has cerebral palsy and has experienced that fact first-hand, decided to do something about it.

Dean and his brother, an engineer, created LUCI, a power wheelchair add-on with sensors to monitor surroundings, detect potential hazards, alert the user, and even slow or stop the chair.

According to the 2021 LUCI Safety Report, the equipment’s curb drop-off protection is 99 percent effective. It claims to be 100 percent effective at slowing a chair and about 95 percent effective in stopping a chair completely before a collision.

The equipment costs \$8,445, including installation and financing is available. It is currently available for Permobil M3, M5, F3 and Quantum Edge power chairs, and will be available to Sunrise QUICKIE users soon.

The LUCI company is headquartered in Nashville, TN, and the equipment is manufactured in Denver, CO.

For more information, visit the company website, [luci.com](http://luci.com)

## BRP Grants

Barrier Removal Grants are available to qualifying renters or homeowners and their family members who have mobility limitations.

Grants are available to:

- People in Omaha, Council Bluffs, and Lincoln & Lancaster County.
- People with low to moderate income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- People who need help removing barriers in their homes.

Examples of eligible modifications include outside ramps and lifts, grab bars, handrails, widened doorways, accessible tubs and showers, and reachable sinks and counters.

League staff offer a variety of services to assist in making homes more accessible to people with disabilities. For more information or for an application for a Barrier Removal Grant, contact:

Lincoln CIL, 1701 P St., Lincoln, NE 68508; Ph.402-441-7871

Omaha CIL, 5513 Center St., Omaha, NE 68106; Ph. 402-595-1256

SW Iowa CIL, 1520 Avenue M, Council Bluffs, IA 51501; Ph. 712-323-6863

## Keep Sidewalks Clear, Passable This Winter

Winter is on the way and with it chances for snow and ice, making it harder for everyone to get around.

If you find it difficult walking through snow or on ice, imagine the difficulty for someone using a wheelchair, walker or other mobility device. The League reminds everyone to keep that in mind this winter and please keep your sidewalks and curb cuts clear and passable.

Sidewalks are a lifeline for people with disabilities and seniors. When snow or ice makes them impassable, that may prevent people from getting to work, to the store, or to the doctor. If someone using a wheelchair is forced into the street because of a blocked sidewalk, that puts them at the mercy of traffic and could become a matter of life or death.

This is more than an issue of good citizenship and neighborliness – it's also the law. Lincoln, Omaha, Council Bluffs, Norfolk, and most other cities and communities have ordinances that require snow removal on public sidewalks within a specified period of time. Fines may result for not abiding by the ordinances. Contact your local city government for more information on snow removal ordinances.

## Snow Closing Info

We have designated KFOR radio as our weather station.

In times of severe weather, please turn to KFOR 1240 AM, or go online to [www.kfor1240.com](http://www.kfor1240.com) for the latest word on cancellations.

## Support the League of Human Dignity When You Shop at Amazon By Buying Through AmazonSmile!

Do you already shop online at Amazon? Please try AmazonSmile! It's the same great Amazon you love, but a percentage of the value of your purchase will automatically be donated to the League of Human Dignity. You shop. Amazon gives!

Just go online to AmazonSmile, sign in and start shopping!

## Try the League's Equipment Loan & Rental Program

Have you or a family member ever suffered a minor injury that required the use of crutches or a wheelchair for a short time? Has a recent illness or accident made it necessary to use a walker, transfer bench or a commode? Do you have equipment that you no longer need?

Through the League of Human Dignity's Equipment Loan Program, you can rent or borrow many durable medical equipment items for a small fee. We also encourage donations of these items.

We do not loan or rent items that require special or custom fitting and/or supervision by a doctor, such as braces or corsets.

All donated items need to be in good shape. We do not accept donations that need repair.

Items we loan include Tub Seats & Benches, 2-Wheel Walkers, Canes, Crutches, Commodes, Reachers, and Grab Bars.

A one-time fee of \$5 is required — \$25 for Rollator Walkers — and the loan lasts as long as the items are needed. All loans are subject to availability.

Items we rent include Manual Wheelchairs, Transport Wheelchairs, Rolling Shower Chairs, Knee Walkers, and Hoyer Lifts.

Monthly rental and deposits vary by item and rent includes all maintenance and servicing during rental period. All rentals are subject to availability.

For details, to see if we have what you need, or to see if you have what we need and would like to make a donation, call or visit the League of Human Dignity office nearest you.

# Where to Find Us

## LINCOLN

Center for Independent Living  
1701 P Street, Lincoln, NE 68508  
Phone 402-441-7871

## OMAHA

Center for Independent Living  
5513 Center Street, Omaha, NE 68106  
Phone 402-595-1256

## NORFOLK

Center for Independent Living  
400 Elm Avenue, Norfolk, NE 68701  
Phone 402-371-4475

## SOUTHWEST IOWA

Center for Independent Living  
1520 Avenue M, Council Bluffs, IA 51501  
Phone 712-323-6863

## PANHANDLE

Medicaid Waiver Office  
17 E 21 St., Scottsbluff, NE 69361  
Phone 308-632-0470

## KEARNEY

Medicaid Waiver Office  
3811 29th Avenue, Suite 2  
Kearney NE 68845  
Phone 308-224-3665

## NORTH PLATTE

Medicaid Waiver Office  
2509 Halligan Dr., North Platte, NE 69101  
Phone 308-532-4911

Online at: [leagueofhumandignity.com](http://leagueofhumandignity.com)  
& Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter

# League Services Promote Independent Living

People with disabilities often face barriers to achieving and maintaining their independence.

The services provided by the League of Human Dignity's four Centers for Independent Living in Nebraska and Southwest Iowa are designed to help them overcome those barriers.

- These services include, but are not limited to:
- Individual and systems advocacy
- Information and referral
- Independent living skills training
- Peer counseling and support
- Transition from institutions to the community or from school to the next phase of life
- Training in personal assistant hiring and management
- Barrier removal grants
- Equipment loan and rental

The League has been helping people achieve and maintain their independence for 50 years.

Find out whether we can help you by calling 402-441-7871. Contact our offices at 1701 P Street in Lincoln, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, or any of our other Centers for Independent Living, listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our CILs serve 43 Nebraska counties and eight counties in Southwest Iowa. We also serve all 93 Nebraska counties through the state's Medicaid Waiver Program for Adults with Disabilities.

## TAGG Your Purchases & Support the League

1. Download the Together A Greater Good (TAGG) mobile app.
2. Choose us & Upload a photo of your receipt from a participating business.
3. The business will make a donation to us AT NO EXTRA COST TO YOU!

## Classifieds

Classified ads cost \$5 for the first 25 words and 25 cents for each additional word. To place an ad, write to: On The Level, League of Human Dignity, 1701 P Street, Lincoln, NE 68508; call Jim at 402-441-7871 v/tdd; call toll free at 888-508-4758; or fax: 402-441-7650. Equipment, supplies and other items for sale must be accessible to, or for the use of, people with disabilities.

## **League-Branded Merchandise**

### **Fleece Vests**

Blue or Gray; Sizes Lg through 4XL; While Supplies Last; All sizes \$29.95 (price includes sales tax)

### **Long-Sleeved T Shirts**

Navy blue; Sm-2XL \$13.95 (price includes sales tax)

### **Hooded Sweatshirts**

Navy blue; Sm-XL \$24.95; 2XL \$25.75 (price includes sales tax)

### **Cotton Tote Bags**

\$5.95 (price includes sales tax); While Supplies Last

## **The League of Human Dignity Building Corp.**

The League of Human Dignity Building Corporation is taking applications for one and two bedroom apartments with roll-in showers in Lincoln, Omaha, York, Columbus, Norfolk and Hastings.

These are HUD units, and rent is based on income.

Eligible applicants must qualify under income guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Applicants must experience disability to qualify.

To apply, or for more information, call Nada Resnik-McNenny, 402-441-7871 or 888-508-4758 (toll free) V/TDD, or email: [nmcnenny@leagueofhumandignity.com](mailto:nmcnenny@leagueofhumandignity.com)

Equal Housing Opportunity

## **National ADA Symposium Virtual in 2022**

The 2022 virtual National ADA Symposium is set for May 9-12.

Single-day, multi-day and full conference registration rates will be available. Pricing and session descriptions will be forthcoming.

The annual four-day conference is the largest conference on the Americans with Disabilities Act and the source for latest information on all things related to the ADA. This training is open to the public and will provide a wide variety of session selections with nationally-recognized expert presenters. It is coordinated and hosted by the Great Plains ADA Center, based in Columbia, Mo.

For the most up-to-date information, visit [www.adasymposium.org](http://www.adasymposium.org).

# A Note to Our Consumers

While more and more people are getting vaccinated against the ongoing Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it still has not quite gone away — and new variants are causing increased cases in some areas.

With this in mind, the League of Human Dignity is continuing some of its precautions:

- League offices will remain locked during business hours. League staff will continue to provide services to our consumers via phone, email, fax, mail or through other arrangements designed to emphasize minimal personal contact.
- If you need to drop off timesheets, correspondence or other documents please use the mail slot or the receptacle provided.
- If you need to rent or borrow durable medical equipment, please call the League and make arrangements by phone first, then you may sign the required documentation and pick up your equipment at the designated location.

If you have any questions or concerns, call your local League office. Our phone numbers are listed above. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

And please follow your local directives with regard to COVID-19 precautions.