

ON THE LEVEL

From the League of Human Dignity

February 2024

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. Our website: leagueofhumandignity.com

Schools Reminded of AT Requirement

Assistive Technology Must Be Provided to Students Who Need It

Schools are getting a reminder that they must determine whether their students with disabilities need assistive technology devices or services.

The U.S. Department of Education on Jan. 22 issued a Dear Colleague” letter and a “myths and facts” document, highlighting schools’ responsibility under the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The IDEA requires that when individualized family service plan or individualized education program teams meet to develop, review or revise a student’s plan, they are required to consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services.

“AT devices and services can help improve outcomes for children, develop important skills and abilities, and prepare them for the workforce and life after high school,” said the letter, written by the department’s Glenna Wright-Gallo, assistant secretary of special education and rehabilitative services, and Roberto J. Rodríguez, assistant secretary for planning, evaluation and policy development.

“By providing children with disabilities with the tools they need to succeed, we can help break down barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable educational system for all.”

Not only are schools legally required to provide and fund any AT necessary for a child to receive a public education — regardless of age or disability — schools also must make sure children, families, teachers and related service providers are trained to use the devices at home and at school.

Examples of AT devices for children with a variety of disabilities include text-to-speech software, word prediction devices, augmentative and alternative communications devices, and visual schedules and timers.

“We all have a role to play in ensuring access to necessary AT devices and services for children with disabilities,” the letter said. AT devices and services must be available, accessible, and appropriate for children with disabilities and their families.

“It is critical that IFSP and IEP Team members understand how to procure, implement, and evaluate AT devices and services for children with disabilities,” the letter concludes.”

Accompanying the letter is a 24-page document entitled “Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services”.

The booklet is meant for parents, service providers, educators, school administrators and other related service workers. Its opening page explains that it is designed to “increase understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act’s (IDEA’s) assistive technology (AT) requirements, dispel common misconceptions regarding AT, and provide examples of the use of AT devices and services for children with disabilities and to highlight the different requirements under Part C and Part B of IDEA.”

CEO’s Note

Over your lifetime, the odds are you will experience a disability that impacts your ability to live independently. A disability doesn’t define person. It may present unique challenges and limitations, but, these can be overcome with the right technology and support.

According to the CDC.gov., here are 10 tips to help you live a more independent life:

1. Start Slow With Daily Life Decisions. ...
2. Modify the Home. ...
3. Establish a Support System. ...
4. Consider Learning, Employment and Volunteering Opportunities. ...
5. Find a Hobby. ...
6. Live a Healthy Lifestyle. ...
7. Seek Financial Assistance. ...
8. Get the Equipment You Need.

9. Utilize Technology to Build Skills
10. Maintain a Positive Attitude

One important step is to contact the League of Human Dignity. The League can start you on your path to living a more independent life. The League can offer services and information to guide you and enable your access to supports for a more independent life.

Call the League at 1-888-508-4758 and get started today!

Kathy Kay, League Co-CEO

21.3M People Choose ACA Coverage

Marketplace Enrollment Climbs by Nearly 5 Million from Last Year

More than 21 million people picked a health care plan through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace during this past open enrollment period, federal officials have announced.

Plan selections totaled 21,310,538, a record for the marketplace, which began in 2013. The total includes 5,045,290 new enrollees and 16,265,248 returning consumers. Officials noted that open enrollment continued in four states and the District of Columbia through Jan. 31.

In Nebraska, 117,882 people signed up for coverage, compared to 101,490 last year. In Iowa, 111,423 people signed up for coverage, compared to 82,704 last year.

“For decades, when it came to federal programs we could depend on to keep Americans covered, three were always top of mind — Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, but now it’s crystal clear that we need to add a fourth — the Affordable Care Act,” said US Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra.

“Once again, a record-breaking number of Americans have signed up for affordable health care coverage through the Affordable Care Act’s Marketplace, and now they and their families have the peace of mind that comes with coverage,” Becerra said.

Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure agreed.

“These historic enrollment numbers are a testament to the need for comprehensive, quality, affordable health insurance, and we must do everything we can to protect and expand access to coverage for all people,” Brooks-LaSure said.

She added that the Marketplaces are delivering on the Affordable Care Act’s promise to provide the peace of mind that comes with having health insurance to millions of Americans.

Two federal programs, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the American Rescue Plan contribute to making Marketplace plans affordable, officials said. Four out of five HealthCare.gov consumers were able to find health care coverage for \$10 or less per month for plan year 2024 thanks to the programs.

Because of continuing provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act, CMS expects nine out of 10 consumers to be eligible for savings.

Compared to the Open Enrollment Period last year, nearly 4.2 million more people with household incomes less than about \$75,000 per year (for a family of four) enrolled in coverage. That demonstrates that when coverage is affordable, people sign up, officials said. Marketplace coverage has also been critical for many people transitioning from Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The Marketplace Open Enrollment Period ran from Nov. 1, 2023, to Jan. 16, 2024, for states using the HealthCare.gov platform, which include Nebraska and Iowa. State-based Marketplace enrollment deadlines vary.

People who become eligible for Medicaid or CHIP may enroll in coverage anytime year-round. For those no longer eligible for Medicaid or CHIP, a special enrollment period is available to enroll in Marketplace coverage.

Additionally, eligible individuals with household incomes less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately \$22,000 a year for an individual and \$45,000 a year for a family of four) can enroll in Marketplace coverage anytime through a special enrollment period. Consumers who experience a change of life circumstance — such as marriage, birth, adoption, or loss of qualifying health coverage — may also be eligible for a special enrollment period.

For more information or for assistance finding a navigator to help in signing up for coverage, visit [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov)

Keep Snow, Ice Cleared Away this Winter

It is that time of year to remind everyone of how important it is to clear sidewalks, parking lots and parking spaces as well as curb cuts during the winter.

Especially after our two back-to-back snow storms in Nebraska, it is even more important to address the snow and the ice that accumulates on the streets and sidewalks. In Nebraska especially, we know how difficult winter weather can be on transportation. For people with mobility issues or who use chairs, winter can be even more impactful

Snow and ice are problems for everyone living in winter climates. But they are potentially worse for people with disabilities. This is especially so for disabled people who don't drive,

and have to rely on sidewalks and other pedestrian pathways to go to work, shop, or leave their homes for any reason.

Wheelchairs and mobility scooters have a harder time navigating sidewalks, curb ramps, and streets. People who use canes or walkers and individuals with vision impairment may find the smallest patches of ice or snow dangerous. Individuals who drive may find that accessible parking places are not cleared. Here are some quick tips to ensure that access is being provided:

- The entire accessible route should be cleared.
- Do not push snow into accessible parking
- Shovel and pretreat ramps
- Remove doormats as this can hinder access for wheel chair or power chair users

How can each of us do our part?

1. We need to do all we can do personally to clear sidewalks, ramps, and other public pathways.
2. If we are able, we can offer to help disabled people shovel out after storms.
3. We can impress on our community leaders the importance of being more proactive in the sidewalk clearing plans in our own cities and towns.

While we have no control over the weather, we can always try to do a better job of reducing the impact on people with disabilities.

League Employees Saying . . .

Hello:

Jackie Beal, Medicaid Waiver Services Coordinator, Omaha
Jolynn Miller, Services Coordinator, North Platte Medicaid Waiver Office
Roynika Rafiner, Services Coordinator, Omaha
Mark Zulkoski, Services Coordinator, Omaha
Rae Dixon, Services Coordinator, Lincoln
Nicole Bookout, Services Coordinator, Omaha
Cadie Davidson, Services Coordinator, Omaha
Zachary Miller, Services Coordinator, Kearney Medicaid Waiver Office

Good-Bye:

Tracy Grieb, Panhandle Medicaid Waiver Office Director, Scottsbluff

Nebraska Client Assistance Program/Hotline for Disability Services

The Client Assistance Program is a free service to assist those individuals who may be having questions or concerns with Nebraska VR (Vocational Rehabilitation), the Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired (NCBVI), or any of the Centers for Independent Living across the state. The program can advise and advocate to help clients communicate concerns, help them understand agency rules, regulations, and procedures, work through disagreements, as well as provide information. The Hotline for Disability Services provides that information and referral piece to anyone with questions or concerns dealing with any type of disability, regardless if they are working with one of the above-mentioned agencies or not. CAP determines the nature of the concern, identifies specific problems, and provides assistance by using the program's statewide directory.

Call (800) 742-7594 or contact Jodi Bodnar at jodi.bodnar@nebraska.gov or Shari Bahensky at shari.bahensky@nebraska.gov for more information. You may also learn more on the CAP website at www.cap.nebraska.gov.

Barrier Removal 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 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

2024 Health Observances

February

February is American Heart Month, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
AMD/Low Vision Awareness Month, Prevent Blindness America
National Cancer Prevention Month, American Institute of Cancer Research

Feb. 2 is National Wear Red Day, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
Feb. 2 is National Rheumatoid Arthritis Awareness Day, Rheumatoid Patient
Foundation

Feb. 7 is National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention

March

March is National Kidney Month, National Kidney Foundation
National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, Colon Cancer Alliance
Brain Injury Awareness Month, Brain Injury Association of America
National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, Special Needs Alliance
Save Your Vision Month, American Optometric Association
Autoimmune Disease Awareness Month, Autoimmune Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Red Cross Month, American Red Cross

March 10-16 is National Patient Safety Awareness Week, Institute for Healthcare
Improvement

March 20 is World Oral Health Day, World Dental Federation

March 26 is American Diabetes Association Alert Day, American Diabetes
Association

March Highlights Kidney Health

March is National Kidney Month, a time to raise awareness about kidney health, understand the importance of kidney research, and for people to take steps to safeguard their own kidney health.

Kidney disease often is referred to as a “silent disease,” because there are usually no symptoms during its early stages. Up to 90 percent of Americans who have it don’t know they have it until it is advanced.

The good news is the earlier it’s diagnosed, the sooner you can take steps to protect your kidneys from further damage. Protecting your kidneys may allow you to continue to work, spend time with family and friends, stay physically active, and do other things you enjoy.

To prevent kidney disease, the National Kidney Foundation recommends taking proactive steps to keep your kidneys healthy and prevent the onset of chronic kidney disease (CKD). You can protect your kidneys by managing high blood pressure, making healthy food and drink choices, and reducing stress.

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases recommends the following to protect your kidneys:

Know your risks

If you are over 60 or have risk factors like diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease, consider talking with your doctor about getting tested for kidney disease.

Schedule tests to check for kidney disease

Your doctor will use two quick tests to check for kidney disease — a urine test to check for damage and a blood test to check how well your kidneys are removing wastes from your blood. If your kidneys show signs of damage, your doctor may refer you to a kidney specialist, called a nephrologist, or recommend annual or more frequent testing.

Follow your kidney health plan

Your doctor can work with you to create a treatment or monitoring plan. Because chronic kidney disease is progressive, it is very important to continue to follow your kidney health and to update your care plan as needed.

Equipment Loan Program

If you or a family member should find yourselves recovering from an injury or medical procedure and in need of a specific piece of durable medical equipment, either short term or long term, where would you turn? For crutches? A shower chair? A toilet riser?

Through the League of Human Dignity's Equipment Loan Program, you can borrow many durable medical equipment items for a small fee, for as long as you need them.

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

There is a one-time \$10 fee — \$35 for Rollator Walkers — and the loan lasts as long as the items are needed. All loans are subject to availability.

We also have items for rent, including Manual Wheelchairs, Transport Wheelchairs, Rolling Shower Chairs, Knee Walkers, and Hoyer Lifts. Monthly rental and deposits vary by item and rent includes maintenance and servicing during rental period. All rentals are subject to availability.

We do not loan or rent items that require special or custom fitting supervision by a doctor.

We also encourage donation of gently used equipment. All donated items need to be in good shape. We do not accept donations that need repair.

For details, about obtaining equipment or donating, call or visit the League of Human Dignity office nearest you.

TBBS Helps Nebraska Readers Keep Reading

Don't think you have to give up enjoying your favorite books or magazines just because your ability to read, hold a book or turn pages may be limited.

You still can enjoy reading with the aid of Nebraska Library Commission's Talking Book and Braille Service. The service is a part of a nationwide network of cooperating libraries, spearheaded by the National Library Service, a division of the Library of Congress.

The program is free, and provides audiobooks, audio magazines and Braille material through the mail and through digital download to people with a visual or physical condition, or a reading disability limiting their use of regular print.

The program's collection consists of books and magazines like those found in a public library. Easy-to-use playback equipment also is provided free on long-term-loan. Materials in the collection and the playback equipment are mailed to and from the library postage-free.

The service is available to individuals, as well as schools and other facilities, such as nursing homes, hospitals and senior citizen centers.

The program's in-house sound studios also record and produce audiobooks and audio magazines from Nebraska and regional authors as well as material about Nebraska and the Great Plains. The recordings from the Nebraska Collection also are made available for loan to patrons.

For more information, including how to apply for the service, email nlc.talkingbooks@nebraska.gov or call 1-800-742-7691. The Nebraska Talking Book & Braille Service main web page is at the Nebraska Library Commission website, nlc.nebraska.gov.

More Tips for Spotting Social Security Scams

Social Security officials again are offering tips to protect yourself from scammers.

Stay informed of the latest scam trends

Scammers frequently change their approach, with new tactics and messages to trick people. Stay up to date on the latest news and advisories. Make sure you understand the latest scam trends at www.ssa.gov/scam. Stay informed by:

- Following reliable news sources.
- Subscribing to scam alert newsletters.
- Staying connected with your local law enforcement agencies.

The more you know, the better prepared you'll be to identify and avoid scams.

Be wary of sharing personal information

Phishing is one of the main ways that scammers attempt to trick people into providing personal information. Pay close attention to emails or messages asking for your username, password, or other personal information.

Scammers pretend to be from familiar organizations to gain their victims' trust. Stay alert when receiving calls that you did not request claiming to be from banks, government agencies, or other well-known companies.

When in doubt, contact the organization directly through official channels to verify that the request is real before sharing any personal information or making payments.

Use strong passwords

Create strong, unique passwords like a phrase with upper and lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters. Don't use passwords that are easy to guess like birthdays or names.

Consider using a password manager to generate unique passwords and securely store them for all online accounts.

Be savvy with QR codes

QR codes are increasing in popularity. They're in restaurants, on parking meters, in emails, and on social media — and scammers have noticed.

Scammers are placing fake QR codes on top of official ones or creating fake QR codes on social media advertisements to get access to your personal information.

Never scan random QR codes. If the QR code looks odd or altered, do not scan it.

Protect your social media profiles

Take a moment to review the privacy settings on your social media platforms and limit the amount of personal information you share publicly.

Scammers may use your social media posts to personalize scams or get access to your accounts without your permission. Regularly check your friends list and remove any unfamiliar or suspicious accounts.

In February, Social Security officials say they want to make protecting ourselves against scams a top priority. By staying informed, being alert and careful, and safeguarding online accounts, the risks can be significantly reduced.

Watch a Social Security video to help identify the red flags at www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyaUWTFLw3c

League Services Promote Independence

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.

Services provided by the League include:

- 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 next phase of life
- Training in personal assistant hiring and management
- Barrier removal grants
- Equipment loan and rental

The League has the experience and the expertise — we have been helping people achieve and maintain their independence since 1971.

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

Our Centers for Independent Living 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 who are aged or have disabilities.

The League of Human Dignity is a statewide partner agency with Nebraska's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). The ADRC is a state agency providing information, referral and assistance for accessing community services and long-term care options.

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
& Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter

SSA Offers Free Retirement Webinar

Social Security is hosting a webinar in March, explaining retirement, Medicare and Survivor programs.

The Agency's Kansas City Regional Public Affairs Office held the first of two free pre-retirement webinars Jan. 30. The next will be March 20 from noon to 1 p.m.

"Social Security 101: Understanding Retirement, Survivor and Medicare Benefits" is an hour-long training that will provide information about eligibility and filing options for the Social Security Retirement, Survivor, and Medicare programs. A representative from the Kansas City Public Affairs Office will discuss online tools available for planning and managing benefits, and how to sign up for a "my Social Security" account.

The webinar is for people nearing retirement age or people who assist them.

For more information or to register, go online to www.ssa.gov/kc/webinars/

Another free webinar is March 28, designed for people helping others with SSI applications and related assistance programs. It is entitled "Understanding Disability Benefits: Social Security and Supplemental Security Income."

National ADA Symposium Set for Minneapolis

Registration is now open for the National ADA Symposium in June.

The annual in-person event is set for June 9-12, at the Hilton Minneapolis in Minneapolis, MN. A virtual symposium is May 6-8. Registration for that event will open in February.

The annual symposium is the most comprehensive conference on the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is the source for the latest information on regulations and guidelines, implementation strategies, and best practices related to the ADA. Presenters include

nationally recognized representatives of agencies and organizations that are involved with the ADA.

The ADA will mark its 34th anniversary in 2024. The annual conference is coordinated and hosted by the ADA National Network and the Great Plains ADA Center, based in Columbia, Mo.

For the most up-to-date information, visit gpadacenter.org.

31st Annual ADAcon Set for This Fall

This year's ADAcon is set for Oct. 15-17 at the Hotel Du Pont in Wilmington, DE.

The 31st annual event — officially the Mid-Atlantic ADA Conference — is hosted by TransGen Inc., and the Mid-Atlantic ADA Center. This year's event will give the hospitality and tourism industry the knowledge and tools to create inclusive and equitable experiences for all travelers and visitors, including those with disabilities.

Registration for the conference will open this summer.

Event sponsors have issued a call for proposals from potential presenters at the event. The deadline is Feb. 23.

For more information, visit the ADAcon website at web.cvent.com/event/18b67258-a189-49ff-9da9-a0dbe7cdade1/summary

Associations & Support Groups

The League maintains a list of associations and support groups in Nebraska, Southwest Iowa, the region and the nation for people with disabilities and their loved ones.

To see the complete list, in pdf format, please visit our website: leagueofhumandignity.com/getinvolved/ and click on "Support Groups."

We aim to keep the list as up to date as possible, so additions and changes are welcome. Call the League at 402-441-7871.

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; 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.

The League of Human Dignity Building Corp. Is Taking Applications

The League of Human Dignity Building Corporation is taking applications for 1 & 2 bedroom ground-level apartments, wheelchair accessible, with roll-in showers in Lincoln, Omaha, Norfolk, Columbus & York.

These apartments are HUD Section 202 & 811 projects and are available to individuals who experience disability or who are elderly. Units come with a Section 8 Certificate. Eligible applicants must qualify under income guidelines established by the

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) To apply, or for more information, call Katie Navratil at 402-441-7871 or 888-508-4758 (toll free) or email knavratil@leagueofhumandignity.com

Equal Housing Opportunity