



# GCD ACCESS NEWS

## ABOUT GCD

The New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability (GCD) is committed to improving the quality of life of all New Mexicans with disabilities by addressing social integration, economic self-sufficiency, political resolve, physical and program accessibility, and full participation in the benefits of life and rights of all individuals.

GCD addresses physical, sensory, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers to forward its mission. Such barriers may keep a person with a disability from enjoying the full aspects of community living.

GCD works to improve the quality of life of New Mexicans with disabilities through progressive systems advocacy.

GCD promotes community living and access to: employment opportunities; universal access to information; appropriate and available assistive technology; accessible education; accessible, affordable, universally designed housing; accessible and available transportation (rural and urban); available home and community-based services; and access to social and recreational settings.

GCD serves as liaison and advisor to the Governor and Legislature on disability issues. GCD programs include:  
Disability Awareness and Advocacy Program  
Physical Accessibility Unit  
New Mexico Technology Assistance Program  
Brain Injury Advisory Council

## IN THIS ISSUE:

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- Tech Corner
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- Pat T's RAMP story
- Agency News
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# PROGRAM UPDATES

## AWARENESS & ADVOCACY

The GCD awarded six organizations Quality of Life grants for the 2023 fiscal year. The awards range from \$4,800 to \$14,800. The list of grantees and their awarded projects includes:

- Adelante Development Center's Diverse IT program which will expand the number of refurbished computers and computer training to provide people with disabilities.
- Carrie Tingley Hospital Foundation which will expand its Wheel Runners Adaptive Basketball program.
- Cloud Dancers Therapeutic Horsemanship which will expand its program and diversify its activities.
- Collins Lake Autism Center which will install adaptive playground equipment at their center.
- High Country Supported Living which will increase the number of day programs offered and increase the number of people with disabilities served.
- THRIVE in Southern New Mexico which will purchase a shed and tools to support its Day of Caring program.

The 2022 Quality of Life Grant program ends in June, and the application for next year's grant cycle will open in the spring of 2023. Check the GCD website for more information. Quality of Life Grant Program | NM Governor's Commission on Disability ([state.nm.us](http://state.nm.us)) Please share this information with organizations that would benefit from a GCD grant.

## PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY UNIT

Our new Residential Accessibility Modification Program (RAMP) Manager will start her first day as the Governor's Commission on Disability's newest staff member Thursday, February 2nd. We are very fortunate to have been able to add someone with previous experience in serving the best interest of elderly and individuals with disabilities. She will fit seamlessly into the GCD and occupy a newly created position for us that will provide leadership and administration for the program as we grow and adapt for the future. The RAMP provides home modifications for individuals with disabilities so they may continue to live in their own homes rather than needing to move into long-term care or skilled nursing facilities.

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# PROGRAM UPDATES

## PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY UNIT CONTINUED

We completed an interview last Wednesday for an Architect I position which provides support for the RAMP as well as responding to general physical accessibility questions from the public, in-field site inspections, plan reviews and trainings. Our interview candidate has terrific experience in the physical access related aspects of our agency and we hope to onboard him presently.

## BRAIN INJURY ADVISORY COUNCIL (BIAC)

The Safe Routes to School program at Las Cruces Public Schools is very grateful for our partnership with the New Mexico Brain Injury Advisory Council, which is a program under the NM Governor's Commission on Disability.

We know how essential it is to protect our brains. Here is one of our lessons for 3rd graders when we teach bike safety.

"Imagine I store my laptop on a high shelf, and as I take it down, it accidentally drops to the ground. Would this be a bad thing? It might be. I open up the laptop and the screen isn't cracked, the body isn't broken, and the laptop turns on and works just fine.

But what if I drop my laptop and this time it looks fine on the outside, no broken screen or cracks to the body, but when I go to turn it on, it doesn't work? Would be bad? Yes! They probably couldn't repair my laptop and I'd have to get a new one! And just like this, if you are riding your bike, you might crash and everything on your body might be fine, but you might hit your head just wrong (with no helmet) and get a brain injury. Some kinds of brain injury are temporary (like a concussion) but some are permanent, and there's no way to fully heal from them. Did you know that some brain injuries don't even come from a terribly bad crash, just from hitting your head in the wrong way? And you can't get a new brain, can you?

Our brains are like the computers for our bodies. They control our thinking, moving, talking, walking, eating, our feelings. If they get injured, there's a chance they might not heal and you might not live like you did before.

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# PROGRAM UPDATES

## BRAIN INJURY ADVISORY COUNCIL (BIAC) CONTINUED

You may not be able to walk, move, talk in the same way again. We can have disabilities from a brain injury. Do any of you have friends or family members with disabilities? Sometimes people are born with disabilities, and sometimes they come from an injury.

There's good news though! Helmets were specially designed to protect our brains if we hit our heads if we crash on our bikes, scooters, skateboards etc. Helmets can greatly reduce how serious a brain injury can be. Football players always wear helmets to protect themselves against brain injury. Even the very best bicycle riders in the world wear helmets when they bike, not because they're not amazing bikers, but because they know that some crashes are out of their control.

So every time you ride a scooter, skateboard, bicycle and tricycle, wear your helmet. It's YOUR brain, so if you're smart, you'll do everything you can to protect it. Don't worry about what your friends and family will think, they'll soon see that you're the smart one to always wear a helmet to protect your brain."

## NM TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (NMTAP)

In September 2022, NMTAP hosted their annual Assistive Technology Conference (ATC22) at the Sheraton Uptown hotel. It was nice to see everyone in person, where networking engagement is richer and there is an opportunity for hands-on experiences of Assistive Technology (AT). Attendance in the training sessions were lower than usual, with about 100 professionals gaining education in a variety of areas related to AT. We had great exhibitors bringing useful AT and eleven presenters who are experts in their field. Continuing Educational Credits (CEUs) in many disciplines are always offered and we hear from many professionals that the educational event has excellent value. The annual ATC23 will be in September again, so contact us to get information on presenting or to attend.

NMTAP staff provided an exciting technical assistance service for the Albuquerque Museum of Natural History in late 2022 that had a community and an individual effect. We provided a demonstration of Assisted Listening Devices (ALDs) to give an idea of

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# PROGRAM UPDATES

## NM TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (NMTAP) CONTINUED

-how it could be used for audio portions of certain exhibits and for their planetarium audio loop set-up.

A demonstration and loan of an ALD for a volunteer at the museum was also provided, allowing that individual to work with ease.

This was later purchased by the museum for the volunteer to use as an accommodation while performing work tasks.

NMTAP can provide device demonstrations and device loans to individuals with disabilities, professionals, or agencies.

Technical assistance in providing equity in services to the public are also a service we provide. These services are free through our federal grant funding from the

Administration for Community Living (ACL).

Give us a call or email us through our website!

**STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON  
DISABILITY**

**491 OLD SANTA FE TRAIL  
SANTA FE, NM 87501-2753**

**PHONE: 505-476-0412**

**TOLL-FREE (IN STATE ONLY): 877-  
696-1470**

**FAX: 505-827-6328**

**EMAIL: [GCD.MAILBOX@GCD.NM.GOV](mailto:GCD.MAILBOX@GCD.NM.GOV)**



**NEXT PAGE: TECH CORNER**

# TECH CORNER



## January Featured Tech

Technology in 2023 is used for connections and understanding. The featured "Tech Tuesday" equipment from New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP) is making connections easier for people with disabilities. Logitech gaming, Amazon Alexa, and Able Net's iTalk were highlighted in January.

- **Logitech Adaptive Gaming**

Logitech's adaptive gaming device gives the user durable buttons for high performance gaming, replacing a traditional Xbox controller. Logitech partners with accessibility organizations to provide "comfortability and flexibility."

- **Amazon Alexa: Echo Dot**

Whether translating languages, opening and closing doors, turning lights on and off, or offering news and weather updates, the Amazon Echo Dot is one way to gain accessibility in everyday life.

- **Able Net's iTalk**

Able Net's iTalk 4 is an easy way to

provide an individual four side-by-side communications button choices with phrases such as "I'm hungry," "I need help," "I'm finished," etc.

### **HOW CAN I MAKE SURE THIS ACCESSIBLE TECH WORKS FOR ME**

NMTAP offers free services to New Mexicans with disabilities, older adults, and the professionals working with them, to help get them the assistive technology services they need. NMTAP is a statewide program designed to increase knowledge of, access to, and acquisition of assistive or adaptive technology for anyone with any disability, anywhere in the state, of any age.

If you would like to try these devices or check out other devices like them, you can call NMTAP at 505-841-4464, send us a message on Facebook, or view them on our online database at <https://bit.ly/ATDatabase>

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EMPLOYMENT CORNER**

# DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT CORNER

Considering telework as a Reasonable Accommodation has become a pressing question by many in the State of New Mexico and around the country. The Governor's Commission on Disability is working on a one-to-two-page guidance document to be provided to state and local agencies, as well as in this Employment Corner. Title I of the ADA states that a reasonable accommodation in an employment setting is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or during the hiring process.

These accommodations aid an individual with disabilities to successfully perform their ability to obtain a job and/or to perform the essential job functions once hired as equal to their peers without a disability.

The American Disability Association (ADA) requires reasonable accommodations as they relate to three aspects of employment:

- 1) ensuring equal opportunity in the application process;
- 2) enabling a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job;
- 3) making it possible for an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

Examples of reasonable accommodations include making existing facilities accessible, job restructuring, offering part time or modified work schedules (including alternate locations such as teleworking from home), acquiring, or modifying equipment, changing employment-related tests, training materials or policies, providing qualified readers (for the blind) or interpreters (for the deaf).



Employers are not required to provide telework to all disabled employees who request it, but an employer is required under the American's Disability Act to consider the option as a reasonable accommodation request. This request can be requested by a co-worker, the employer or by the person with a disability in need of such accommodation.

Once a request is made, the interactive process begins by discussing if teleworking is the most reasonable accommodation for the employee to fulfill the essential function of the job.

The employer can request a medical note from a medical provider to determine the nature of the medical condition/disability

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# DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT CORNER



that requires such teleworking services if it is not obvious. The employer can discuss other accommodations that would work based on the medical condition/disability that the employee has and that would fulfill the employee's essential functions of the job without compromising their health or safety.

The interactive process continues until the approved accommodation is effective for the employee. This process is individualized to the employee's specific situation, and it may be different with the next employee that request such accommodations. An employer may never have a blanket policy of not allowing certain accommodations, such as telework.

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491 OLD SANTA FE TRAIL  
SANTA FE, NM 87501-2753  
PHONE: 505-476-0412  
TOLL-FREE (IN STATE ONLY): 877-696-1470  
FAX: 505-827-6328  
EMAIL:GCD.MAILBOX@GCD.NM.GOV**

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STORIES**



# PERSONAL STORIES



Pat, a recipient of the Governor's Commission on Disabilities' (GCD) Residential Accessibility Modification Program (RAMP), lives alone in a manufactured home in Belen. One of the first projects GCD constructed after a hiatus at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, due to concerns regarding staff potentially bringing a health threat to a vulnerable service population. Pat suffers from a deteriorating spine. Her health alternated between periods of relative normalcy and periods of excruciating pain. The initial in-person visit with her had been arranged with GCD's project awarded contractor to meet with her and a RAMP project manager at her home.

The proposed modification in this case was to be a ramp to the front door of her home which would replace a dangerously rotting existing ramp. She expressed concern regarding the current design which had porch steps perilously close when approaching the ramp from the entry door. Pat uses a walker at times and a wheelchair at those times when her deteriorating spine would not allow that. The ramp was scheduled to begin construction the following week. The contractor is one of the best ramp builders and is invested in serving the individual recipient above and beyond the scope of work. He interacts with the recipient throughout the construction project to adjust if necessary. The builder had come up with a solution which solved Pat's vertigo concerns regarding the steps.

Upon completion at the final inspection, Pat was grateful... Like many of our RAMP recipients her home had other shortcomings like leaky roofs and windows. Pat wished there was a great 'umbrella' entity which provided resources which folks in similar situations might find helpful. The idea of creating a network of home accessibility modifications providers as well as those who might be seeking modifications (including nonprofits and other caring organizations representing individuals with disabilities best interest) resonated. A few months later was conducted the first meeting of this networking group.

# AGENCY NEWS



Did you know?

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act requires all state and local government agencies with 50 or more employees to assign a person responsible for ensuring the agency's compliance with the ADA. That person is usually called an ADA Coordinator, and they must have decision-making power related to physical infrastructure, policies, and procedures, or report directly to someone who does. For larger agencies, best practices would be to have a dedicated position for the ADA Coordinator because ensuring compliance with the ADA is a big job.

Best practices additionally recommend having one ADA Coordinator for Human Resources (which falls under Title I of the ADA, employment) and one for all other functions of the agency (Title II.)

The Title II ADA Coordinator must respond to requests for accessible communication, for instance a request for an American Sign Language interpreter for a public meeting. They must understand the ADA well enough to be able to identify ways the public buildings and spaces do not comply, and they must be able to ensure that the needed changes are made in order to come into compliance with the law. They must also establish and publish an agency ADA statement and grievance procedure, ensure the agency's website is accessible, and ensure equitable access in many other ways.

The Governor's Commission on Disability coordinates an ADA Coordinator Training Certificate Program in the state of New Mexico, in partnership with the Southwest ADA Center and the Great Plains ADA Center. If you or someone in your agency is interested in becoming an ADA Coordinator, or taking any of the trainings related to the certificate, please contact Jeminie Shell at [Jeminie.shell@gcd.nm.gov](mailto:Jeminie.shell@gcd.nm.gov) or 505-396-0312. If you want to start learning more about the ADA immediately, you can visit our website to learn about the ADA Coordinator Certificate program and start taking free on-demand courses that are linked at the bottom of this page. All of these courses apply to the ADA Coordinator Certificate. Please contact us with questions.

ADA COORDINATOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM AND RELATED TRAINING

[HTTPS://GCD.STATE.NM.US/ADA-COORDINATOR-CERTIFICATE/](https://gcd.state.nm.us/ada-coordinator-certificate/)

NEXT PAGE: EMERGENCY RESOURCES

# EMERGENCY RESOURCES



The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) came out with a 2022 report on the Nation's Preparedness based on their Stakeholder Advisory team. This report reveals the impact that climate change and associated natural disasters continues to have an impact for the United States. The report summarizes what the nation faces:

- "Climate change continues to impact the nation and worsen existing vulnerabilities. The report found that in 2021, 92% of communities identified at least one natural hazard associated with climate change as being most stressful to emergency management capabilities in their assessments. The U.S. experienced a total of 20-billion-dollar climate and weather-related disasters.

The nation may not be adequately prepared to provide sufficient Body Recovery/Storage and Medical Care in the face of a catastrophic disaster.

When comparing total Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) and Stakeholder Preparedness Review (SPR) data from 2021 against the National Capability Targets, the nation overall has the lowest capability in the Body Recovery/Storage and Medical Care target areas.

• Factors such as poverty, lack of access to transportation, and over-capacity housing occupancy continue to weaken the ability of individuals and communities to prevent injury, death, and financial loss in a disaster."

In this report, FEMA did leverage data to understand the factors increasing risk to socially vulnerable populations.

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# EMERGENCY RESOURCES

They used the National Risk Index (NRI) social vulnerability filter that is based on data from the University of South Carolina's SVI (Social Vulnerability Index) for the United States. It includes data on 29 socioeconomic variables that contribute to social vulnerability.

In quote "Eight of these variables explain nearly 80% of the national variations in social vulnerability; wealth, race and social status, age, ethnicity and lack of health insurance, persons with access and functional needs, service sector employment, race, and gender." It is recommended that each community use the NRI to determine its unique risk profiles and take actions to promote greater preparedness for disasters on the community level.

Through this profile, communities can increase equity in the community they serve, including individuals with disabilities. One of their recommendations is to do a "preparedness actions, trends and perceptions of individuals in historically underserved communities", which includes those who function with the use of assistive aids and services.

To prepare for not only climate change disasters, but even man-made disasters is to be inclusive of people with disabilities in the communities you serve. It is important to reach out to PWD (People with Disabilities) and invite them to the table.



When inviting PWD, having a range of representation from all sectors of the disability community (Physical, Mental, Cognitive and individuals with sensory loss (Visual impairment and Deafness) is important as they know their own access needs best. They also live life as a person with a disability, and they can explain what it is they need to be effective in preparing for a disaster and also surviving one.

# TRAININGS

## Ongoing

- ADA Coordinator Certificate | NM Governor's Commission on Disability  
<https://gcd.state.nm.us/ada-coordinator-certificate/>
- Training | Rocky Mountain ADA  
<https://rockymountainada.org/services/training>
- Trainings - Mid-Atlantic ADA Center  
<https://www.adainfo.org/trainings/>
- Self-paced Webinars  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/continuing-education/SelfPacedWebinars.aspx>
- Accessibility Online  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ao>
- Conferences and Online Training - ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program (ACTCP) - Great Plains ADA Center  
<https://www.adacoordinator.org/page/Training>

## February/March

- **FEB 9** Creating and Fostering Inclusive Wellness and Recreation Programs for individuals with Disabilities:  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/articles-n-rec/session/?id=111037>
- **FEB 22** One State's Lessons Learned and Best Practices to Creating an Equitable Work Environment in State Government:  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ADA-Audio/session/?id=111041>
- **FEB 22** Ask an ADA Professional Questions RE: Parking and the ADA (Part 2)  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/adapro/session/?id=111042>
- **MAR 2** Accessible Parking and Passenger Loading Zones  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ao/session/?id=111048>
- **MAR 15** Reasonable Accommodations and the ADA: An Update on the Case Law
- **MAR 16** Inclusive Imagery – Writing Alt-Text Depicting People with Disabilities and Other Marginalized Identities  
<https://www.accessibilityonline.org/ada-tech/session/?id=111046>

# USEFUL LINKS

## Links

**NM Governor's Commission on Disability:** <https://gcd.state.nm.us/>

**NMTAP:** <https://www.tap.gcd.state.nm.us/>

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** <https://www.ada.gov/>

**ADA National Network:** <https://adata.org/>

**CDC on Corona virus :** [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/needs-extra-precautions/FS\\_COVID\\_Plan\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/needs-extra-precautions/FS_COVID_Plan_FINAL.pdf)

**ADA Coordinator Certificate Program and Related Training:**

<https://gcd.state.nm.us/ada-coordinator-certificate/>

## Social

**New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability:**

<https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoGCD>

**New Mexico Technology Assistance Program:**

<https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoTAP>

**New Mexico Brain Injury Advisory Council**

<https://www.facebook.com/NMBIAC/>

State of New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability

491 Old Santa Fe Trail Santa Fe, NM 87501-2753

Phone: 505-476-0412

Toll-free (in state only): 877-696-1470

Fax: 505-827-6328

Email: [gcd.mailbox@gcd.nm.gov](mailto:gcd.mailbox@gcd.nm.gov)

