

New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability Annual Report



Fiscal Year 2020



STATE OF NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON DISABILITY



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

Linnea Forsythe
Acting Agency Director

Curtiss Wilson
Acting Chairperson

January 2021

Dear Honorable Governor Lujan Grisham,

I have had the honor to serve as the Acting Director at the Governor's Commission on Disability since July 27, 2020. I am proud to submit our 2020 Annual Report on the work of the Commission and the staff.

The Commission proved resilient in the face of the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Our four program areas - Disability Awareness & Advocacy, Physical Accessibility, Technology Assistance Program, and the Brain Injury Advisory Council faced similar challenges as other service providers. We needed to safely provide services that require in-person contact, and provide flexibility when clients wanted to postpone projects due to COVID-19 exposure concerns. We faced the cancellation of in-person outreach and education events, and large conferences that usually bring people together from all over the state. School closures presented significant challenges to our assistive technology loan program and bicycle helmet distribution effort, as these services are provided in collaboration with K-12 and post-secondary schools.

We met these challenges with a commitment to adapt our services, infuse innovation into our programs, and collaborate more closely with our partners.

- **Disability Awareness and Advocacy:** At the beginning of the Pandemic the state disability commissions and the Department of Health's Bureau of Health Emergency Management (BHEM) created the Disability, Access, and Functional Needs Coalition. This group meets weekly to facilitate communication and problem-solving around issues affecting the Disability Community during the Pandemic. We are addressing issues such as effective communication of critical public health information, testing, crisis standards of care, and vaccine distribution. Participants include – The Governor's Commission on Disability, BHEM, Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Commission for the Blind, Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Aging and Long-Term Services Department, other state agencies and local government representatives, community members, and disability advocates. In FY 2021, we are working with these groups and people with lived experience in the Disability Community to develop an After Action Report to assess challenges and successes during the pandemic.

- **Physical Accessibility Program:** In March 2020, when we knew very little about COVID-19 and how it spread, our Residential Accessibility Modification Program immediately began to prioritize outdoor ramp projects. This allowed us to continue to provide services and minimize risk to our clients and contractors. To minimize contact, we also offered to work with clients virtually to get the pictures and measurements we needed to complete the technical drawings for their projects. We require strict adherence to COVID-19 safe practices, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and disinfecting touched services.
- **Technology Assistance Program:** One of the biggest challenges for the TAP team was how to provide a device demonstration in a virtual environment so a client had a good sense of how the device worked. After much experimentation, the team devised a multi-camera set-up that allowed the client to view all aspects of the device and ask questions. The TAP team also set-up curbside pick-up and mail for device loans. Trainings were provided on-line, and in FY 2021, TAP partnered with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Commission for the Blind, and CYFD to create a training on accessibility and virtual conference platforms.
- **Brain Injury Advisory Council:** BIAC continued to pursue its mission of educating the public on issues impacting people with brain injury. BIAC worked with UNM and Brain Injury Alliance to create online trainings. One set of trainings was targeted to the public, and another set of trainings was created for and delivered to domestic violence providers. In FY 2021, BIAC is coordinating with school districts, public health workers, and other state agencies such as CYFD, to strategize how to distribute bicycle helmets to children during the public health emergency.

In Fiscal Year 2020, the Governor’s Commission on Disability turned challenges into opportunities to continue to serve New Mexicans with disabilities. We performed 95 physical accessibility plan reviews and site inspections and provided 62 home modifications. We distributed 2,405 assistive technology devices for use by persons with disabilities and 2,054 bicycle helmets to children. We responded to 4,566 inquiries for disability information and technical assistance, and trained 2,365 people statewide on disability related issues.

We thank you for your support of our efforts to serve our citizens with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Linnea Forsythe
Acting Agency Director

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New Mexico

Governor's Commission on Disability

By statute, the New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability is comprised of fifteen members: nine Governor-appointed members and six statutory members.

Commission Members

Appointed

Curtiss Wilson (Albuquerque) Acting
Chair, *December 2020-Present*

Susan Gray (Santa Fe) Chair, *until
December 2020*

Thomas Graham (Santa Fe)

Doris Dennison (Yah Ta Hey)

Trudy Luken (Las Cruces)

Trinidad de Jesus Arguello (Taos)

Erlinda Seymour (New Laguna)

Judy Sena (Las Vegas)

Vacant

Vacant

Statutory

Aging and Long-Term Services, Katrina Hotrum-Lopez,
Cabinet Secretary (Anthony Romero, proxy)

Children Youth and Family, Brian Blalock,
Cabinet Secretary (Elizabeth Hamilton, proxy)

Department of Health, Dr. Tracy Collins, MD
Cabinet Secretary (Marc Kolman, proxy)

Department of Workforce Solutions, Bill McCamley,
Cabinet Secretary (Chris Zafra, proxy)

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation,
Executive Director Diane Mourning Brown

Human Services Department, Dr. David Scrase, MD
Cabinet Secretary (Melanie Buenviaje, proxy)

Staff

Linnea Forsythe, *Acting Agency Director,
July 2020-Present*

Anthony Alarid, *Interim Director until July 2020*

Dominic Gonzales, *Access Specialist*

Stan Ross, *Access Specialist*

Guy Surdi, *Disability Specialist*

Lisa McNiven, *Disability Specialist*

Crystal Benavidez, *Chief Financial Officer*

Antoinette Chavez, *Business Operations
Specialist*

Tracy Agiovlasis, *Program Manager*
New Mexico Technology Assistance Program

Jesse Armijo, *Technology Specialist*
New Mexico Technology Assistance Program

Maurice Alvarez, *Technology Coordinator*
**New Mexico Technology Assistance
Program**

Monica Montoya, *Program Coordinator*
Brain Injury Advisory Council

MISSION



The Governor's Commission on Disability is committed to improving the quality of life for 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.

OBJECTIVES

- Increase awareness and knowledge of disability issues among policy-makers and the general public
- Promote the elimination of barriers that limit physical, sensory, programmatic, attitudinal and communication access
- Increase opportunities for New Mexicans with disabilities to live successfully in the community with needed services and supports
- Increase collaboration and cooperation among disability related organizations in New Mexico

STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Governor's Commission on Disability was created in 1978 under Section 28-10-1 NMSA 1978. Its continuing mandate is to:

- Promote public awareness of disability from a social, political and cultural perspective that focuses on improving the quality of life of people with disabilities
- Educate and encourage public and private action related to community living for people with disabilities on accessibility issues such as employment, housing, transportation, voting, building codes and recreation
- Provide advice and testimony to the Governor and Legislature regarding disability issues
- Focus on disability issues over the life span. The Governor's Commission on Disability advocates for policies and programs that promote inclusion of all people with disabilities into community living in New Mexico



DISABILITY AWARENESS & ADVOCACY

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) signaled a commitment to end discrimination against people with disabilities and ensure the same access and opportunities that everyone else has. Passing the ADA was the first step, but we must continue to challenge ourselves to make the goals of the ADA a reality. The Governor's Commission on Disability commits itself to raising awareness about disability issues, and advocating for changes in our government and community that provide respect and equitable access for people with disabilities.

OUTREACH, INFORMATION, and ADVOCACY GCD staff provide information, referrals, and individual advocacy for New Mexicans with disabilities all over our state. Presentations and written materials are provided by the Governor's Commission on Disability program staff connecting New Mexicans to resources and improving the quality of their lives. Across all of GCD's program, we provided information, referral, technical assistance, and advocacy to 4,566 people.

ADA CERTIFICATION AND TRAINING It is critical that our local and state government agencies are accessible to the public and responsive to employees with disabilities. To support agencies in meeting their responsibilities under the ADA, GCD offers an ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program. This training program is a partnership with the Great Plains ADA Center, the University of Missouri, and the Southwest ADA Center. It covers a broad range of topics, including the Americans with Disabilities Act Title I and II, Standards for Accessible Design, Disability Awareness, Service Animals, and Website Accessibility. These trainings are also open to business, non-profit organizations, community members, state employees who are not ADA coordinators.

DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAININGS Through these trainings GCD supports the dignity of people with disabilities by promoting "People First" language, and showing that universal design helps ALL people, including people with disabilities. GCD trainings provide information on disability culture, etiquette, and effective communication across a person's lifespan. GCD advocates for people with disabilities to have the same access as everyone else to facilities, programs, and services. GCD focuses on accessibility in key industries and has developed materials and trainings specifically for health care settings and the hospitality industry.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges and surprising opportunities for the Disability Community. GCD's New Mexico Disability Emergency Planning Advisory Council (NMDEPAC), which was formed four years ago and is comprised of people with disabilities, immediately coordinated with other groups to assess and respond to the needs of the Disability Community. The Disability, Access, and Functional Needs (DAFN) Coalition was convened in March 2020 to share information about how New Mexico was responding to

the pandemic. DAFN continues to meet weekly to discuss how to meet the needs of people with disabilities with regards to – testing, telehealth, care rationing, food insecurity, effective communication of critical public health information, education, and vaccine distribution.

SERVICE ANIMALS GCD provides trainings to businesses, government agencies, and the general public on the Service Animal Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Outreach and education efforts focus on the rights and responsibilities of a service dog owner, public entities and businesses. The Governor’s Commission on Disability works with law enforcement agencies, businesses and the public to reduce complaints and conflicts with “fake” service animals or service animals that do not display appropriate behavior in public.

ADAPTIVE SPORTS The Governor’s Commission on Disability continues to develop an integrated network of support with government agencies, program providers and public/private organizations to sustain, develop and expand adaptive sports and recreation in New Mexico. New Mexicans with disabilities of all ages have an opportunity to participate in physical and social activities statewide to improve their health and well-being.

QUALITY OF LIFE GRANTS This small grant program provides limited financial assistance to schools, non-profit 501(c)3 organizations, religious, and Tribal-based organizations. The grant’s purpose is to expand and enhance services that will improve the quality of community living for New Mexicans with disabilities. Fiscal Year 2020 recipients were:

- ❖ **Carrie Tingley Hospital Foundation** offered eight one-day camps to children with and without a disability. These camps provided a fun space for children with disabilities to socially interact with other children who do not have a disability through adaptive sports and recreational activities. Activities included adaptive archery, hand-cycling, wheelchair basketball, kayaking, swimming, and a variety of arts and crafts.
- ❖ **Good Samaritan Society** invested in technology at their nursing home facilities to engage their long-term and short-term residents in virtual sports, dancing and other activities. They also included education for residents on cell phone use and basic computer skills.
- ❖ **Mesa to Mesa** improved the health, safety, and security for people with disabilities and low-income homeowners by providing minor repairs to their homes and connecting them to resources for larger home repair projects.





PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAM

Physical access is a key factor in providing an equal opportunity for people with disabilities to fully participate in home and community living. The Governor's Commission on Disability provides the following programs and services to make our environment and spaces accessible.

RESIDENTIAL ACCESSIBILITY MODIFICATION PROGRAM (RAMP) Everyone should have the opportunity to live in their home and stay in their communities. This becomes increasingly difficult when someone has a physical disability and cannot easily maneuver in their home or get in and out of their house. Without modifications to the home, the resident is at risk for falls and serious injury which could send them to a long-term care facility. RAMP provides essential home modifications, such as walk-in showers, grab bars, and entrance ramps to low-income individuals with a disability who are residents of New Mexico and do not qualify for another program.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our priority has been the safety of our clients, staff, and contractors. At the beginning of the pandemic we prioritized outdoor ramp projects to minimize risk and exposure. We also offered to

work with clients virtually to get the pictures and measurements we needed to complete the technical drawings for their projects. The RAMP project continues to provide both outdoor and indoor modifications, but we require strict adherence to COVID-19 safe practices, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and disinfecting touched services.

The demand for RAMP services has only increased throughout the years. In its first full fiscal year, FY 2017, the program completed 15 projects. In FY 2020, RAMP completed 62 projects for New Mexicans with disabilities.

KEEPING NEW MEXICANS IN THEIR HOMES The people we meet through the RAMP program are incredibly kind and generous. We worked with a gentleman in Northern New Mexico who was in a wheelchair. He needed a walk-in shower, a raised toilet, and grab bars in the bathroom. While everything was within the budget, this gentleman did not "want to take away from someone else". We assured him that we could provide for him and many others as well. When the project was finished, the changes to his home brought him such relief that he would not let us leave without a hug and many thanks. To be able to change the lives of people like this gentleman, makes us forever grateful to be a part of a program that impacts people's lives so positively.

RAMP Projects in Fiscal Year 2020 by Region

Region	No. of Projects	Counties
Northwest	3	Cibola, McKinley
Northeast	24	Rio Arriba, San Miguel, Santa Fe, Taos
Metro Area	11	Bernalillo
Southwest	17	Doña Ana, Hidalgo, Luna, Otero, Sierra, Socorro, Valencia
Southeast	7	Curry, Eddy, Torrance

LEARNING FROM OUR CLIENTS RAMP worked with a wonderful woman in Southern New Mexico who needed a new ramp to enter and exit her home. She had a ramp, but it was rotting. She had many concerns about the design of the ramp. Her current ramp created a fall risk and she was worried about how emergency response personnel would get a gurney in and out of her home. The RAMP project manager, the contractor, and the client worked together to design a ramp that would meet her needs. Involving our client and listening to her at every step resulted in a ramp that responded to her concerns and made her feel safe in her home.

TECHNICAL TRAINING The Physical Accessibility Program provides trainings to promote Universal Design principles, ADA compliance, and greater access to buildings and facilities. GCD supports the idea that our environment should be designed so it can be accessed by everyone, regardless of age, size, or disability. Our trainings include information on current building codes related to access and ADA standards. We present to Municipalities, State Agencies, Architects, Building Code Officials, and anyone interested in creating accessible spaces.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE The Physical Accessibility Program gives technical assistance to individuals, private businesses, and local and state governments in New Mexico who have questions about building codes related to access, ADA Standards of Design, and reasonable modifications and accommodations. Although GCD does not have enforcement authority, we seek to prevent or resolve issues before they escalate by providing information and guidance.

Architectural Plan Reviews – Program staff review architectural plans for accessibility on new construction and renovation projects for commercial and public works projects. We suggest revisions to preliminary drawings, verify compliance with current accessibility codes and standards, and work closely with the designer or architect to correct non-compliance issues.

Site Inspections – Program staff conduct site inspections when requested, to identify existing access issues in commercial buildings and facilities. Upon completion of any plan review or site inspection, a report is generated documenting all non-compliance items and submitted to responsible parties.





NMTAP

New Mexico Technology Assistance Program

The New Mexico Technology Assistance Program's (NMTAP) mission is to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve their life goals through the use of Assistive Technology (AT). We serve individuals with disabilities, family members, and service providers statewide. This support allows individuals access to education, employment, daily living, and civic participation.

The **DEVICE LOAN PROGRAM** offers teachers, therapists, case managers, DVR counselors and persons with disabilities the opportunity to sample AT devices/software prior to purchase. During the pandemic, NMTAP staff used curbside pick-up and mail to get these devices in the hands of our clients. In FY20, 328 devices were loaned to 182 individuals, with most deciding to purchase the devices.

NMTAP provides **DEVICE DEMONSTRATIONS** to individuals with disabilities and their advocates. During the pandemic, these demonstrations were provided virtually with one-on-one support from NMTAP staff. Demonstration of AT devices and software allows someone to identify the most practical and efficient option to meet their goals. In FY20, 80 individuals with disabilities and 38 advocates benefitted from a demonstration.

DEVICE RE-UTILIZATION The Equipment Re-Use Program refurbishes gently used durable medical equipment and computers and provides them to individuals with disabilities who have no other options. NMTAP partners with Adelante Development Center to provide this service through the Back-In-Use and DiverseIT program. In FY20, 2077 pieces of durable medical equipment and computers were provided to 1017 individuals with disabilities.

FIGHTING THE IMPACTS OF COVID WITH TECHNOLOGY

When the COVID-19 Pandemic hit New Mexico in March 2020 students in K-12 schools were profoundly impacted by immediate stay-at-home orders. A student and their Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) contacted NMTAP, because the assistive device they used at school every day was not available at their home. The student had an auditory processing disability and needed an assistive listening system. The school was unable to immediately provide the necessary technology that the student needed to accomplish schoolwork and interact with the class in a virtual classroom environment. NMTAP was the only available option the SLP and the student had to obtain a piece of technology on such short notice. The assistive listening system was able to bridge the communication barrier faced by the student and allowed them to effectively continue the school year with success.



FINANCIAL LOANS NMTAP, through San Juan Center for Independence, offers low interest financial loans to individuals with disabilities statewide through two loan programs: The ACCESS Loan program is for anyone that has no other option of obtaining needed AT. The SEED Loan program is for Self-Employment of Entrepreneurs with Disabilities to purchase equipment when starting or expanding their personal business. In FY20, 13 individuals with disabilities received loans through the Access Loan program and none through SEED Loans.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTS SOCIAL INTEGRATION A 17-year-old man was strong and healthy when he broke his neck while skateboarding on Memorial Day in 2009. His life changed from that day forward, becoming quadriplegic and relying on a ventilator. He lives with his parents and siblings, and transportation was a problem that impacted the entire family. Between his tall frame and the large wheelchair he needed to accommodate a ventilator, he could not get into a typical minivan with a wheelchair ramp without hitting his head. Taking the bus was impossible, and with these transportation barriers he was becoming isolated. Fortunately, he and his parents were approved for a low interest loan through the ACCESS Loan Program for a Ford Transit Connect with a wheelchair lift and a higher roof clearance. The van made it possible for him to engage in life again. He now participates in family outings, activities, and his hospital therapy appointments.



TRAINING AND EVENTS NMTAP provides groups of professionals and individuals with disabilities training on AT equipment, software, and applicable services. A two-day conference in Albuquerque and several one-day conferences in rural areas are conducted annually. During the pandemic, many of these conferences were cancelled, and NMTAP provided trainings on-line. In FY 2020, NMTAP trained 399 people at 14 conferences. We also participated in 32 additional events statewide and provided direct assistance to 2110 individuals.

NMTAP provides **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** to agencies and community partners on how to use assistive technology to improve accessibility and digital access to their programs for people with disabilities.

AgrAbility PROJECT NMTAP, as a grant partner with New Mexico State University Extension Services, provides AT assessments to farmers and ranchers with disabilities to allow them to continue farming or to increase food production. Trainings in agricultural AT and adapted processes are also offered statewide.



NMTAP and GCD are advised by the NMTAP Advisory Council, which is mostly composed of individuals living with disabilities who use technology to meet a variety of challenges. Their input is critical to our ability and success at meeting the needs of the people we serve.



The **BRAIN INJURY ADVISORY COUNCIL** (BIAC) advises the Governor’s Commission on Disability and is a source of expertise and advocacy on issues impacting individuals living with brain injuries. The Council is composed of between 18 and 24 individuals appointed by the Governor from all areas of the state. Members of the Council include individuals with brain injuries, family members, healthcare professionals, and other agency professionals.

The Council supports research into brain injury prevalence, impact, and treatment, and makes recommendations to the Governor’s Commission on Disability and other entities concerning community support systems, long-term services, employment, emergency medical services, rehabilitation, and prevention. The Council coordinates state activities relative to the concerns of persons with brain injuries, their families, and caregivers.

BRAIN INJURY EDUCATION AND PREVENTION BIAC promotes education, prevention and increased public awareness for the purpose of decreasing the incidence of preventable brain injuries.

In Fiscal Year 2020, BIAC partnered with the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences at UNM to develop educational videos about traumatic brain injuries and stroke that are culturally relevant and understandable by a broad audience. Originally, UNM planned to conduct trainings on brain injury in the community, but the COVID-19 Pandemic forced UNM and BIAC to pivot and create a training that would be engaging in a virtual environment. These educational and artistic videos were the result. The videos and other educational materials will be used to educate health care workers and the community in rural areas through a collaboration with the University of New Mexico’s Health Extension Regional Offices. Currently, the videos are available online to the public at <https://tinyurl.com/yd25lav6> (TBI) and <https://tinyurl.com/y8eyoc4p> (Stroke).

MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES
are the main cause of TBI for 15-34 y/o and Over 75 y/o





NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

FISCAL YEAR 2020 BUDGET

REVENUE

General Fund	Federal Fund	Other Revenue	Fund Balance
1,261,302.36	477,017.62	0.00	0.00

EXPENDITURES

Category	2020 Budget	Expenditures	Remaining Budget	% Expended
200 – Personnel Services	1,137,554.00	961,751.27	175,802.73	84.5%
300 – Contractual Services	202,200.00	166,928.96	35,271.04	82.6%
400 – Other	737,326.00	609,639.75	127,686.25	82.7%
500 – Other Financing Uses	0.00	0.00	0.00	N/A
TOTAL	2,077,080.00	1,738,319.98	338,760.02	83.7%

*The \$338,760.02 budget remainder for Fiscal Year 2020, was the result of a vacant Director position for the entire year and a vacant staff position in our Physical Accessibility Program, and cancelled conferences, events, travel, and projects due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.



NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

CONTACT INFORMATION

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