



**GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION
ON DISABILITY**

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2021-2026**

**ADVOCACY &
ACCESSIBILITY**



STATE OF NEW MEXICO



The New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability (GCD) is a state agency committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. Its duties and authorities are covered in New Mexico statutes and regulations (§§28-10-1 to 28-10-12 NMSA and NMAC 9.4.20). GCD operates four programs:

- **Disability Awareness and Advocacy Program**
GCD's Disability Awareness and Advocacy Program provides training and advocacy on a range of issues impacting people with disabilities, including emergency preparedness, service animals, the legal rights of people with disabilities, and the responsibilities of government entities, places of public accommodations, and employers under the ADA. GCD also advocates for greater inclusion and access to employment, medical settings, recreation areas, and cultural sites.
- **Physical Accessibility & Residential Accessibility Modification Program (RAMP)**
GCD's Physical Accessibility and RAMP Program promotes compliance with the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. The program also improves physical access to government offices and places of public accommodation through advocacy, site visits, and architectural plan reviews. Through its RAMP program, GCD provides accessibility home modifications to help people with disabilities stay in their homes and avoid moving out of the community into a long-term care facility.
- **Brain Injury Advisory Council (BIAC)**
BIAC was established by state law (§24-20-3 NMSA) and advises the Governor's Commission on Disability. BIAC is a source of expertise and advocacy on issues impacting individuals living with brain injuries. The Council is composed of 18 to 24 people appointed by the Governor from all areas of the state. Members include individuals with brain injuries, family members, healthcare and other service providers.
- **New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP)**
NMTAP is a federal program created by the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (29 USC §3001). NMTAP's mission is to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve their life goals through technology. It serves individuals with disabilities, family members, and service providers. This support allows individuals to access education, participate in employment, complete daily living activities, and enjoy civic participation.

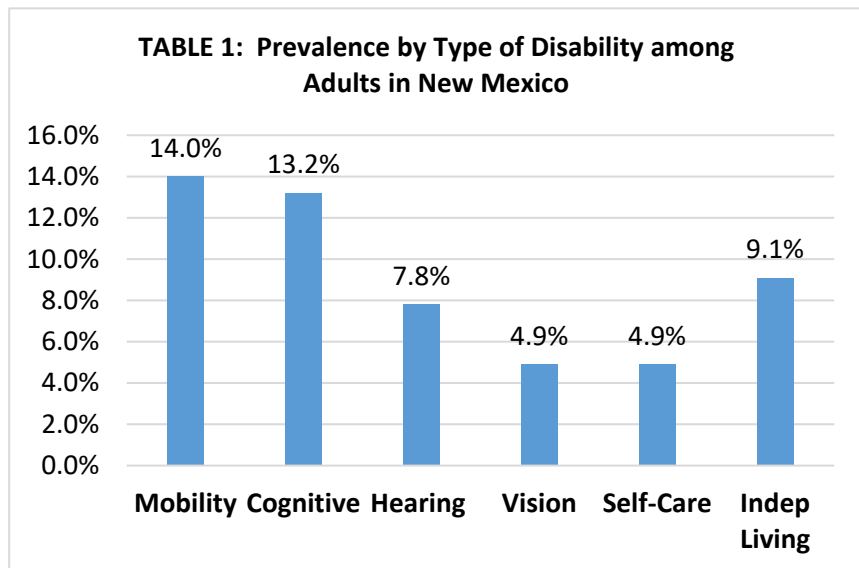
GCD is guided by a Commission of 15 members. Nine members are appointed by the Governor and include individuals with disabilities, parents/guardians, and professionals who serve individuals with disabilities. Six members are state agency representatives. They include the leadership from the Vocational Rehabilitation Division of the Public Education Department, the Department of Workforce Solutions, the Children, Youth and Families Department, the Aging and Long-Term Services Department, the Human Services Department, and the Department of Health.

New Mexico Governor’s Commission on Disability Strategic Plan 2021 to 2026

The New Mexico Governor’s Commission on Disability launches its new 5-year Strategic Plan just as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) celebrates its 30th Anniversary. The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, mandates accessible physical environments, and the use of effective methods of communication. Passing the ADA was the first step, and we continue to challenge ourselves to make the goals of the ADA a reality.

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

GCD’s 2021-2026 Strategic Plan addresses some of the most pressing issues that impact the large number of people with disabilities living in New Mexico. Of New Mexico’s 1.6 million adult residents, an estimated 29% have at least one disability.¹ This is higher than the 26% of adults in the U.S. who have a disability.² In New Mexico, the most prevalent type of disability is related to mobility, followed closely by disabilities related to cognition. (See Table 1³ for prevalence by type of disability).

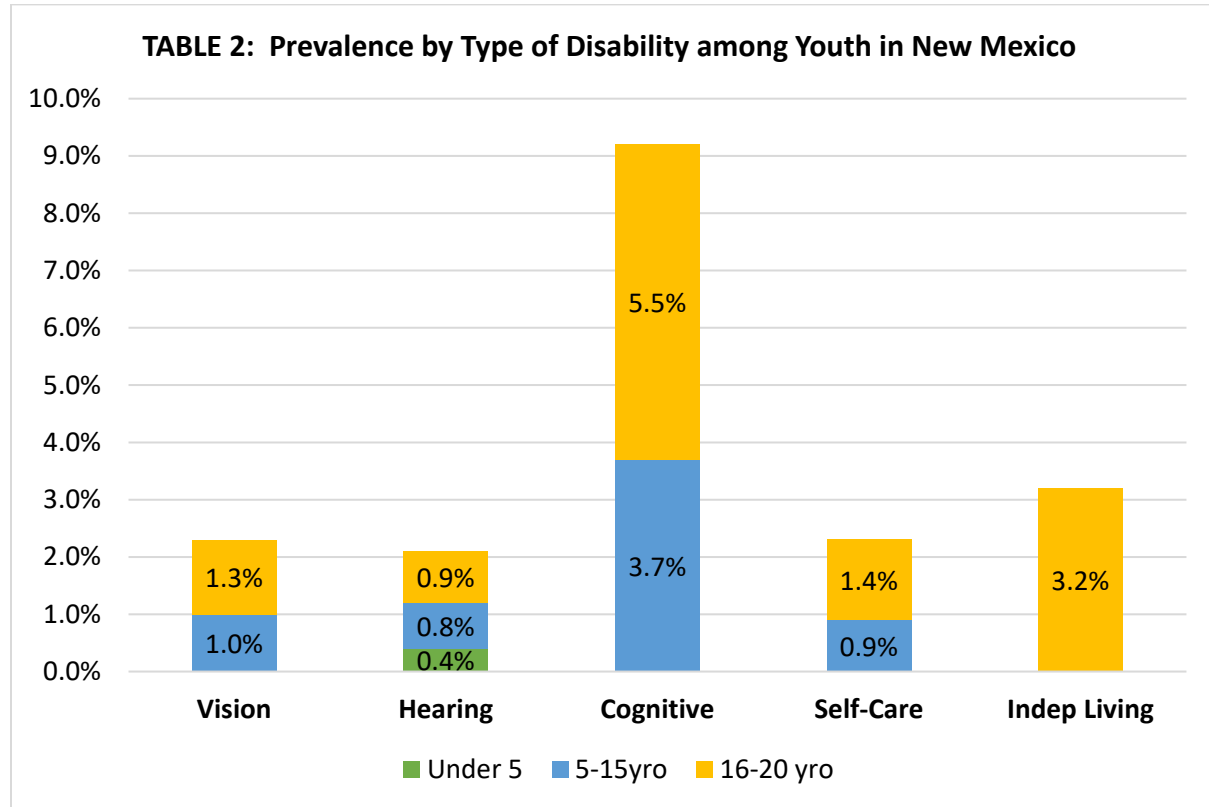


¹ New Mexico Department of Health, *Results from the New Mexico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2019 Annual Report*.

² The Centers for Disease Control, *Disability Impacts All of Us*, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html> (retrieved on 6/7/2021)

³ TABLE 1: New Mexico Department of Health, *Results from the New Mexico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2019 Annual Report*.

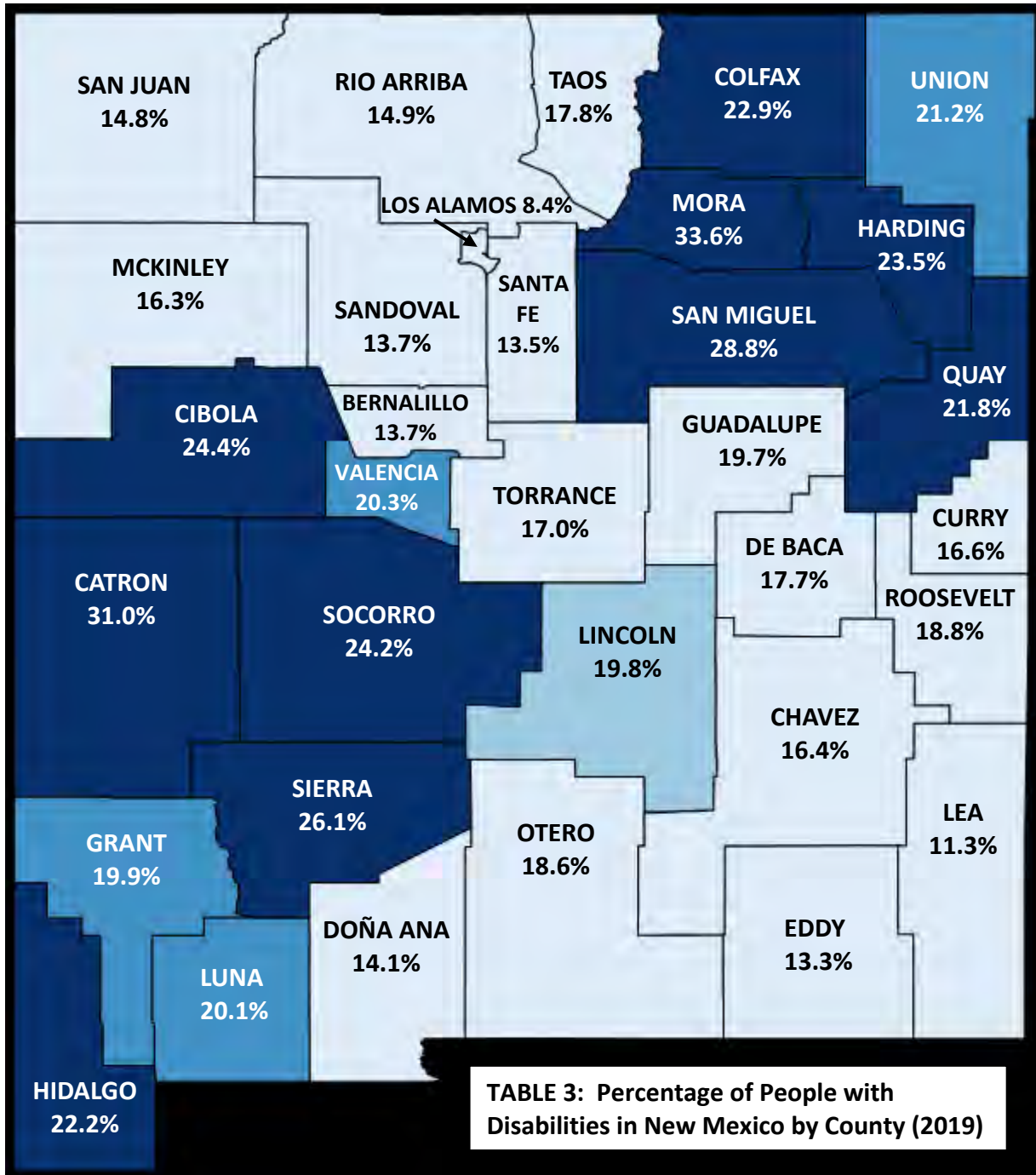
In 2018, the percentage of children and youth living with disabilities was 0.4% for children under 5 years old, 5% for youth 5 to 15 years old, and 8.9% for youth 16 to 20 years old.⁴ The most prevalent type of disability among youth is related to cognition. (See Table 2⁵ for prevalence by type of disability among youth).



⁴ Erickson, W., Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2020). *2018 Disability Status Report: New Mexico*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (YTI).

⁵ TABLE 2: Erickson, W., Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2020). *2018 Disability Status Report: New Mexico*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (YTI).

In New Mexico, a greater percentage of adults living in rural counties report having a disability than those in metropolitan areas, 40.1% and 26.7% respectively⁶ highlighting the need for GCD to focus on the needs of rural residents. (See Table 3⁷ for prevalence by county).



⁶ New Mexico Department of Health, *Results from the New Mexico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2019 Annual Report*.

⁷ TABLE 3: Paul, S., Rafal, M., & Houtenville, A. (2020). *2019 State Report for New Mexico County-Level Data: Prevalence*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.

GCD's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan is divided into eight objectives which were informed by individuals with disabilities, key stakeholders, GCD staff, GCD's Commission members, and data. The input from this community identified healthcare, employment, and inclusion and accessibility as priority areas.

HEALTHCARE: People with disabilities face greater health access disparities and challenges than people without disabilities. In 2019, 34.2% of adults with disabilities in New Mexico experience poor physical health as compared with 6.5% of adults without a disability.⁸ Access barriers were especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic where people with disabilities reported foregoing care and having services withdrawn or cut back.⁹ The move to more telehealth appointments also highlighted access issues due to the lack of appropriate technology, internet connectivity, and difficulty setting up accommodations for effective communication.¹⁰ The need for mental health services is also a significant concern and not just due to the pandemic. In 2019, 30.5% of adults with disabilities in New Mexico experienced frequent mental distress as compared with 8.6% of adults without a disability.¹¹ All of these concerns have highlighted the need for GCD to advocate for equity and accessibility in healthcare, mental health services access, and the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

EMPLOYMENT: Regardless of whether someone has a disability, employment provides financial independence, social interaction, and builds self-esteem. In New Mexico, 33% of adults (18 to 64 years old) with a disability who live in the community are employed, compared with 72.6% of adults without a disability.¹² The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this disparity. People with disabilities reported that during the pandemic they encountered issues with either finding a job, losing a job, reduced hours, or experiencing temporary furloughs.¹³ In April 2021, people with disabilities in the U.S. continue to experience higher rates of unemployment than people without a disability at 10.4% and 5.7% respectively among people 16 to 64 years of age.¹⁴ One of the core priorities of GCD is to increase employment opportunities for and highlight the skills and accomplishments of people with disabilities.

INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY: Just as in the areas of healthcare and employment, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the stressors of everyday life for people with disabilities.

⁸ New Mexico Department of Health, *Results from the New Mexico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2019 Annual Report*.

⁹ New Mexico Governor's Commission Disability, *COVID-19 Preliminary After-Action Report*, May 2021.

¹⁰ New Mexico Governor's Commission Disability, *COVID-19 Preliminary After-Action Report*, May 2021.

¹¹ New Mexico Department of Health, *Results from the New Mexico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2019 Annual Report*.

¹² Paul, S., Rafal, M., & Houtenville, A. (2020). *2019 State Report for New Mexico County-Level Data: Employment*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.

¹³ New Mexico Governor's Commission Disability, *COVID-19 Preliminary After-Action Report*, May 2021.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, *Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics* (retrieved on 5/27/21 from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research-evaluation/statistics>)

During the pandemic, people with disabilities reported inadequate transportation, unstable housing, barriers to accessing medical care, and difficulty obtaining accommodations for remote learning and work. ¹⁵ GCD will continue to advocate to protect the rights of people with disabilities given under state and federal civil rights laws, and provide training and technical assistance to businesses, government agencies, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, emergency response workers and law enforcement, and others. GCD will prioritize advocacy for inclusion and access in areas that impact basic rights - housing, healthcare, employment, education, transportation, adequate broadband, emergency preparedness, and recreation opportunities.

These priorities are incorporated into the eight objectives in GCD's strategic plan.

Key Objectives and Strategies

These eight key objectives will drive the activities of the Governor's Commission on Disability over the next five years:

1. Advocate for equity and accessibility in healthcare and the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Increase awareness and knowledge of disability rights, etiquette, and other issues among policymakers, public and private entities, and the general public.
3. Promote physical, programmatic, and attitudinal access of governmental entities and places of public accommodation in New Mexico.
4. Increase opportunities for people with disabilities in employment.
5. Promote independence, community integration, and inclusion in civic and social areas of life.
6. Increase collaboration and cooperation among disability related organizations in New Mexico and nationally.
7. Operate the Federal New Mexico Technology Assistance Program.
8. Advocate to improve the quality of life and services available to individuals with brain injuries.

¹⁵ New Mexico Governor's Commission Disability, *COVID-19 Preliminary After-Action Report*, May 2021.

OBJECTIVE ONE: Advocate for equity and accessibility in healthcare and in the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Strategy 1.1:** Advocate for and create opportunities for inclusion of people with disabilities in the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Strategy 1.2:** Engage the Department of Health and other medical providers to improve protections for people with disabilities in the State's Crisis Standards of Care and triage protocols.
- Strategy 1.3:** Advocate for effective communication of public health information from local and state entities to all segments of the Disability Community.
- Strategy 1.4:** Advocate for accessible COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines for people with disabilities, including COVID safe practices and prevention efforts.
- Strategy 1.5:** Provide training and technical assistance to medical and mental health providers on disability awareness, accessibility, the ADA, and telehealth accessibility.
- Strategy 1.6:** Advocate for appropriate and accessible mental health services, including services that respond to the emotional and psychological impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on people with disabilities. Participate in the Behavioral Health Collaborative.

OBJECTIVE TWO: Increase awareness and knowledge of disability rights, etiquette, and other issues among policymakers, public and private entities, and the general public.

- Strategy 2.1:** Conduct ongoing public awareness and outreach activities, using a variety of marketing and communication strategies including presentations (in-person and webinars), GCD website, social media, newsletter, town halls, and listening sessions.
- Strategy 2.2:** Conduct public forums in rotating regions to collect information from people with disabilities on their unmet needs and priorities.
- Strategy 2.3:** Conduct research and analysis on disability demographics and current issues and make this information available to the public.
- Strategy 2.4:** Collect and disseminate information regarding the abilities and accomplishments of people with disabilities.
- Strategy 2.5:** Pursue Special Projects to carry out the goals of the Commission, including but not limited to - participating in the New Mexico Disability Emergency Planning Advisory Council and emergency preparedness activities; administration of the Quality of Life Grant initiative; working with law enforcement on disability awareness; and working with the Public Education Department, the Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Children's Youth and Families Department to support children with disabilities in schools.

OBJECTIVE THREE: Promote physical, programmatic and attitudinal access of governmental entities and places of public accommodation in New Mexico.

- Strategy 3.1:** Coordinate the ADA Certification Program to train local and state government employees to be ADA coordinators.
- Strategy 3.2:** Coordinate the ADA and Accessibility training series to educate the public and certain professional groups (e.g., Human Resources Professionals, builders and architects, IT professionals, and program managers) about physical, programmatic, and attitudinal access.
- Strategy 3.3:** Inform and provide technical assistance to the construction industry, businesses, hospitality industry, recreational and cultural sites, and state agencies regarding their responsibility to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and physical access requirements set out in the New Mexico building code and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
- Strategy 3.4:** Assist in the development of physical accessibility codes at the state and national level.
- Strategy 3.5:** Improve physical access to buildings and outdoor areas by conducting site visits, reviewing plans, writing technical reports, and promoting universal design concepts.
- Strategy 3.6:** Provide trainings to the places of public accommodations, emergency management services, transportation providers, the general public, and government entities on service animals.
- Strategy 3.7:** Provide advocacy and technical assistance to the public and government entities to identify and resolve barriers to physical, programmatic, and attitudinal access.

OBJECTIVE FOUR: Increase opportunities for people with disabilities in employment.

- Strategy 4.1:** Work with the State Personnel Office and other state agencies to implement best practices in inclusive employment and make the State a model disability employer.
- Strategy 4.2:** Collaborate with state disability agencies, Department of Workforce Solutions, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Regional Workforce Boards, Economic Development Department, local chamber of commerce, and other relevant organizations to engage businesses, identify employment opportunities, and provide resources and support to both job seekers and employers.
- Strategy 4.3:** Advocate for accessible teleworking policies and provide technical assistance to state agencies, employers, and employees.
- Strategy 4.4:** Highlight the skills and accomplishments and promote the hiring of people with disabilities through public awareness campaigns, and promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Strategy 4.5:** Recognize employers who have shown a commitment to hiring people with disabilities and follow best practices of inclusive employment.
- Strategy 4.6:** Advocate for more effective use of the State Use Act (SUA). Train state agencies on the requirements of the SUA.

OBJECTIVE FIVE: Promote independence, community integration, and inclusion in civic and social areas of life.

- Strategy 5.1:** Provide technical assistance to the Office of the Secretary of State and county clerks to improve voting accessibility.
- Strategy 5.2:** Coordinate a network of support with government agencies, program providers, and other stakeholders to sustain, develop and expand adaptive sports and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Strategy 5.3:** Develop, implement, and maintain the Residential Access Modification Program to keep individuals with disabilities in their homes and out of institutions.
- Strategy 5.4:** Advocate for increased transportation options for people with disabilities, especially in rural areas.
- Strategy 5.5:** Advocate for increased broadband access so New Mexicans statewide have reliable, fast, and affordable internet.
- Strategy 5.6:** Advocate for housing opportunities for people with disabilities by collaborating with local, state, and federal housing programs and advocates.
- Strategy 5.7:** Coordinate with other state agencies to implement CMS's 2014 Home and Community Based Services final rule, which ensures that members have full access to the benefits of community living and receive services in the most community integrated setting.

OBJECTIVE SIX: Increase collaboration and cooperation among disability related organizations in New Mexico and nationally.

- Strategy 6.1:** Expand collaborations and formal partnerships with disability or related organizations in the state and federal government and the non-profit sector.
- Strategy 6.2:** Establish relationships with people with disabilities and organizations in rural communities to increase collaboration.
- Strategy 6.3:** Establish relationships with the Pueblos, Tribes, and Nations and their citizens with disabilities to increase collaboration. Collaborate with the Indian Affairs Department and the Office of Indian Elder Affairs.
- Strategy 6.4:** Co-organize and co-sponsor events and conferences that bring people with disabilities together to promote community, share information, and discuss systemic advocacy priorities, as well as connect them to decision makers, employers, and resources.
- Strategy 6.5:** Lead the ADA Council to support ADA coordinators across the state.
- Strategy 6.6:** Create and lead a statewide network of disability home modification programs and those interested in affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities.

OBJECTIVE SEVEN: Improve access to Assistive Technology through the operation of the Federal New Mexico Technology Assistance Program.

- Strategy 7.1:** Coordinate the Device Loan Project.
- Strategy 7.2:** Coordinate the Device Demonstration and Training Project.
- Strategy 7.3:** Coordinate the Device Reutilization Project.
- Strategy 7.4:** Participate in State Financing Activities as mandated by the federal government.
- Strategy 7.5:** Coordinate the NMTAP Advisory Council. Study and make recommendations to the Governor's Commission on Disability concerning assistive technology needs across the state.
- Strategy 7.6:** Establish and coordinate the NMTAP Satellite Offices around the state.
- Strategy 7.7:** Utilize social media and webinars to reach a diverse audience, including young people with disabilities and people who live in the frontier parts of the state.
- Strategy 7.8:** Collaborate with other state and federal agencies and entities on special projects and grants. This includes collaborating with local workforce boards and school districts.

OBJECTIVE EIGHT: Advocate to improve the quality of life and services available to individuals with brain injuries.

- Strategy 8.1:** Center the voices of individuals with brain injuries by being responsive to the recommendations from the Brain Injury Advisory Council (BIAC) concerning case management, community support systems, long-term care, employment, emergency medical services, rehabilitation and prevention, and the improvement and coordination of state activities relative to the concerns of persons with brain injuries and their families or other caregivers.
- Strategy 8.2:** Advocate for improvements to the continuum of care for people with brain injuries. This includes advocating for increased community services and supports under Medicaid and improved in-state residential treatment options.
- Strategy 8.3:** Engage in activities that improve the communication and coordination between brain injury service providers, individuals with brain injuries, families and caregivers, advocates, state agencies, and other stakeholders.