



Council Connections brings the latest news on disability rights, resources that promote inclusion, and opportunities for advocacy to individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members living in the heart of Vermont Communities.



VERMONT EMBRACES SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING FOR SELF-ADVOCATES

As one of the first states to close its institution for people with developmental disabilities, Vermont is an early adopter of best practices in the field. Now self-advocates, providers, and policy makers have turned their attention to the issue of guardianship and how adults can be more involved in making their own life-changing decisions.

Supported decision-making (SDM) is a national trend that Vermont is actively exploring. From where they live, who they live with, their finances, their education, and even guardianship, the [Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living](#) believes that **people who have control of their lives tend to be healthier, happier, and more involved in their communities.**

VTDDC is part of this effort. In January, the Council awarded two SEEDS grants that work in tandem to divert transition-age youth from Probate Courts in the Northeast Kingdom in order to discuss alternatives to full guardianship. The Disability Law Project works with the courts, while Green Mountain Self-Advocates educates individuals, family members, and school personnel about SDM and the capacity that people with I/DD have to make informed choices when they receive appropriate support.

The Director of the [Developmental Disability Services Division](#), Roy Gerstenberger, describes it as an opportunity that makes sense for all of Vermont. Gerstenberger leads a ground-breaking task force that is looking for ways to give Vermonters with developmental disabilities more say over their lives.



VPR recently interviewed Katharine Breunig, daughter of VTDDC President Fred Breunig, about making decisions in her life.

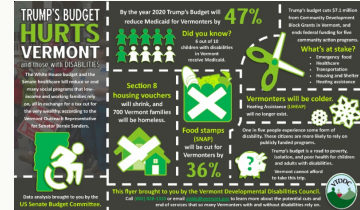
Supported Decision-Making (SDM) is based on common principles adopted by the [Developmental Disability Services Division](#):

- Everyone has a right to make their own decision(s).
- People with disabilities have a right to be their primary decision maker.
- Good decision-making is a skill that can be learned.
- Supported decision-making should be available to all who choose to use it.
- Everyone has a right to fail without serious injury or loss of rights.
- With good supported decision-making, guardianship should be a last resort. With effective use of supported decision-making, guardianship should not be needed. Relationships need to be valued, created, mentored and supported.
- All people need help making decisions. We are all diverse. We all make decisions individually and with support at different times in life.

Formore information, [read or listen to the article by VPR.](#)

WANT TO KNOW HOW VERMONTERS WILL BE IMPACTED IF THE WHITE HOUSE BUDGET IS ADOPTED BY CONGRESS?

VTDDC has designed an [accessible infographic with some startling statistics](#) from the Senate Budget Committee. The Senate is now reviewing the budget, and changes are anticipated, but Senators need to hear from you about the programs you want to protect. Call Senators Sanders and Leahy. Mobilize your friends in other states!



Send an email with your questions to vtddc@vermont.gov



DOCTORS WITH DISABILITIES ARE IMPROVING PRIMARY HEALTHCARE EXPECTATIONS

Despite barriers in medical schools and professions, people with disabilities are changing what American society typically views as a well-equipped and skilled doctor.

As research has shown time and time again, people with disabilities are less likely to receive routine screenings of their physical health, mental wellness, and dental hygiene, and are more likely to need emergency intervention. This is because medical professionals are not trained or equipped to

accommodate all of their patients. But that's changing.

Doctor C. Lee Cohen practices medicine in Massachusetts and has hearing loss in both of her ears. She uses specialized equipment to listen to heart beats, breathing, and hear her patients in general. Doctor Cohen speaks from experience and says, "I know that when you can't hear well, your brain parses words and syllables in a certain way. Instead of asking people to repeat themselves, I ask them to rephrase themselves."

Currently 20% of the American population are considered to have long-term disability, and every American will experience some form of disability within his or her own life. Doctor Cohen isn't the only professional changing how she communicates with her patients. Doctors everywhere who experience disability are more likely to be accommodating and provide optimal care to all of their patients.

Formore information, [read the article by the New York Times.](#)

VERMONTERS ARE EN-ABLE-D TO SAVE

August is ABLE-to-Save Month, a national awareness



campaign sponsored by the [ABLE National Resource Center](#) (ANRC) to promote the use of innovative savings tools for people with qualified disabilities, like the Vermont ABLE Savings Program. ANRC is providing informational webinars throughout the month. Their August 9 event focuses on [ABLE Eligibility and Interplay with Public Benefits](#).

Vermont Governor Phil Scott is expected to issue a proclamation in support of this campaign next week.

Want to learn more about [VermontABLE](#)?

Call 1-800-439-1653 or email team@stableaccount.com

WHAT'S UP, UNDER THE BIG DOME?

Although the Vermont Legislature is on break, there is still a lot happening:

- ALERT! The draft System of Care Plan for Developmental Services will be posted on the DAIL website soon. A public hearing will be held in conjunction with the State Program Steering Committee Meeting on Thursday, August 17. The deadline for written comments is September 15, 2017. This is an important document that sets funding priorities for the next three years.
- At a July 20 hearing, the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) adopted major revisions to the administrative rules that guide Developmental Services. Advocates sought an expansion of these rules in order to protect types of services, reporting requirements, and other provisions from changes by the Agency of Human Services without legislative input.
- Vermonter Advocate Sarah Launderville was present during ADAPT Actions protesting "Repeal and Replace" healthcare legislation. Advocates remain concerned about Medicaid cuts. For more information see: <http://digital.vpr.net/post/after-demise-repeal-and-replace-health-care-advocates-still-fearing-cuts#stream/0>



SAVE THE DATE for the next Quarterly Meeting



Council members work together to increase public awareness and to encourage systems change. They are expected to attend four day-long meetings each year and to be active participants on a committee or work group.

When: **Thursday, September 28, 2017**

Where: [Hannaford Career Center](#), Middlebury, Vermont

The mission of VTDDC is to help build connections and supports that bring people with developmental disabilities, and their families, in the heart of Vermont Communities.