



**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.



## DOES VERMONT'S NEXT FISCAL YEAR BUDGET MARK THE END OF ACT 82?

**With the 2018 Legislative Session nearing the end, disability advocates remain concerned about several pieces of the proposed FY'19 budget.**

While the House restored a \$4.3 million cut to developmental services, it declined to appropriate funds for a second phase of wage increases indented to stabilize the workforce at the Designated and Specialized Service Agencies. The Senate has yet to take action on these two elements of the budget, but seems more favorable disposed to phase 2 wage adjustments.

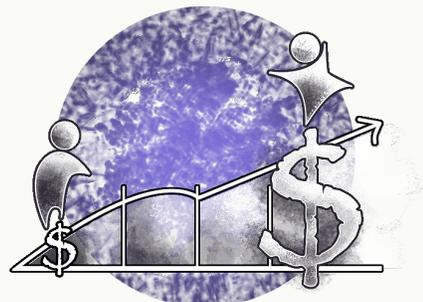
Salaries for licensed clinicians are nearly \$19,000 below that of state employees with similar responsibilities.

In 2017, Vermont legislators passed [Act 82](#) and [Act 85](#) giving a more livable wage to Designated and Specialized Services Agency staff and supervisors. Clients saw a positive shift as Phase 1 introduced a minimum wage of \$14/hour across the system. Staff turnover decreased from 26% to 23%, and vacancies began to fill; but staff morale is still low. Increasing the starting salary has compressed wages, putting some with greater experience and seniority on a par with new staff. In addition, Phase 2 has yet to be embraced by the legislature in this year's budget. A second round of salary increases would target clinical staff.

**"Annual funding for the increasing caseload is essential – it's about health care parity." - Julie Tessler, Vermont Care Partners**

The Executive Director of [Vermont Care Partners](#), Julie Tessler, and Susan Aranoff of the [Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council](#) (VTDDC), have testified several times at the State House about the need to align clinical salaries more closely with that of other state workers with similar job duties

There are many benefits of raising wages across Vermont's home- and community-based system for people with developmental disabilities. These include stabilizing the workforce and a reduction in clients using more expensive services like as hospital



emergency rooms. "Why not pay a little now to save a lot down the road?" asks Aranoff, "it's as much about cost-efficiency as it is about crises-prevention – And it's 100% about the vulnerable people we serve."

to educate the public and policy makers about the importance of Phase 2.

For more information, [read the most recent testimony from Vermont Care Partners.](#)



## AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES MAY BE HINDERED FROM VISITING PUBLIC PLACES

In an effort to block legislation that could significantly weaken the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Vermont Senators Leahy and Sanders recently joined their 41 Democrat colleagues in urging Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell not to bring H. 620, the ADA Education and Reform Act, to the Senate floor for action.

As passed by the House in February, [H. 620](#) would require individuals who experience accessibility barriers at public businesses to submit written notice of the issues. Then, businesses would have up to 60 days to respond and another 60 days to start improvements.

The possibility of disability rights moving backwards has advocates uneasy.

Supporters of H. 620 contend that the bill will prevent unnecessary lawsuits.

Opponents to the bill say that businesses have already had nearly three decades since the passing of the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) in 1990 to address architectural barriers. Under current law, people with disabilities who are unable to enter a public business – such as a store, restaurant, or hotel – may contact their [statewide National Protection and Advocacy system](#) and seek guidance on how to request equal and fair access.

For more information, [read February's article in Disability Scoop](#) and [April's follow-up.](#)



## VERMONTERS WITH A DISABILITY TALKS LGBTQ ISSUES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Self-Advocate and program host David Frye has publicly launched the first episode of his show "Prideability".

David Frye and John R. Killacky discuss pride, community, sexuality, sex, and the importance behind "re-framing the narrative of disability."

**"Sex education is essential for young disabled kids to understand." - John R. Killacky**

David Frye is the founder of the [LGBTQ People with Disabilities Network](#).

Thanks to David there are several groups through out Vermont that meet weekly and offer peer support for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and

questioning.



For more information about people with disabilities who are LGBTQ, [get in touch with the Pride Center of Vermont](#).

## VTDDC AWARDED SEEDS GRANT TO HELP YOUTH WITH LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING

The [New England Youth Theater](#) was awarded \$12,318 by VTDDC to teach advocacy skills and create partnerships with peer-to-peer support groups in the Brattleboro area. Together they will use theater to train young people to speak with confidence, problem solve, and support one another in self-advocacy.



## WE WANT TO SHARE YOUR PHOTOS

VTDDC is looking to expand its stock photographs of Vermonters with disabilities and their families, that show inclusion, productivity, and capability.

Look through your photo albums and find your favorites!  
**We are thankful for anything you're willing to share.**



**Email us at [vtddc@vermont.gov](mailto:vtddc@vermont.gov) with the photos attached and subject line "I am Vermont".**

## WHAT'S UP, UNDER THE BIG DOME?

**VTDDC is at the State House closely monitoring policy that could impact Vermonters with developmental disabilities...**

Legislators are still working on a proposed bill, H.897, that changes how Vermont pays for Special Education. The new system would replace the current reimbursement-based approach with block grants based on the number of students in a supervisory union. The new system is



touted by as offering greater flexibility to serve struggling learners, as well as students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP's)

Spurred by concerns from advocates – including VTDDC – the Senate Education Committee has added safeguards to make sure that increased flexibility does not result in students with disabilities losing services to which they are entitled under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Bill also promotes new ways of providing services that hold promise for better outcomes for a wide range of students. These include Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and reduced reliance on para-professionals. The changes in practice and funding will occur gradually, rolling out between 2020 and 2025.

The Senate Education Committee is still working out the formula for how much funding school districts would receive under the new plan, and a precise timeline for implementation.

## 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, June 28, 2018**

Where: Location to be Announced, Brattleboro, 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.