



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.

THE VERMONT DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL HAS A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP.

VTDDC is proud to announce the appoint of Council Member Michael Gruteke as Vice-Chair.

Mike is a self-advocate from Derby Line and a self-described "fly on the wall" at the Vermont legislature. In the past he served as a board member of the Epilepsy Association of Vermont and United Cerebral Palsy of Vermont.

Mike's passions include improving transportation, communication, and healthcare, and he believes in making a better life for everyone.



By the end of 2018 there were 34,000+ ABLÉ accounts with a cumulative savings of \$171.7 million dollars.

ADVOCATES WONDER WHEN THE ABLE ACT WILL BECOME AVAILABLE TO ALL?

The **ABLE Age Adjustment Act (S. 817)** has been reintroduced in the new Congress by a bipartisan group that seeks to expand eligibility in the popular program from 8 million people to 14.1 million.

Originally passed by the Senate in 2014, the **Achieving a Better Life Experience Act** (ABLE) allows Americans with disabilities to save up to \$100,000 without losing public benefits such as Social Security or Medicaid. But the scope of who qualifies has been limited. Currently, people who were older than 26 at the onset of their disability do not qualify to open an account. The ABLE Age Adjustment Act would increase the age to 46.

"This legislation will build on the foundation of the ABLE Act and expand access to these accounts to more families."

- Senator Chris Van Hollen, Maryland

Last year, some [disability advocates warned that the ABLÉ program could be unsustainable without changes](#) that would substantially increase the number of account holders. But administrators of the Ohio STABLE Program, which administers VermontABLE, have dismissed these claims.

“Enrollment in ABLÉ has not been as fast as we hoped, but it’s steady and the program is not in jeopardy,” explained Kirsten Murphy, Executive Director of the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Program, which has championed ABLÉ. “We are asking people with disabilities to change a fundamental belief – that having money will reduce their public benefits. That takes time.”

To date, 271 Vermonters have taken advantage of Vermont’s version of the ABLÉ program, according to Murphy.

For more information [read the article by the Disability Scoop](#).



Vermont announced its version of ABLÉ in 2017, where the VTDDC Executive Director, Kirsten Murphy, spoke to the positive impact there will be for working families and individuals.



Photo by [Sharon McCutcheon](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Get in touch with someone from [Vermont Health Connect](#) if you have any questions or concerns about your Medicaid coverage.

MEDICARE PATIENTS URGED TO DEFINE DOCTORS VISITS AS "WELLNESS CHECKS"

Seniors and people with disabilities who follow doctors’ recommendations and attend their annual physical are likely to see a steep charge unless they know exactly what to ask for.

People deserve good health, but it doesn't have to cost hundreds of dollars to get it. Up until a few years ago, Medicare did not cover services intended to prevent disease. When founded more than 50 years ago, Medicare was designed to address diagnosis and treatment in older people. **Medicare does not, and has never, covered the cost of a physical exam and associated tests.**

What is the work around for staying healthy and having Medicare pay for it? Request a "wellness visit". Wellness visits are similar to an “annual physical” but without the physical exam. At a wellness visit, the doctor will check a person’s weight, height, and blood pressure. Based on personal and family history, a timeline for vaccinations, screenings, and other prevention services will be created and the doctor will assess the patient for cognitive issues, depression, and safety risks like falls.

Are all aspects of the "wellness visit" covered? Not necessarily. sometimes other tests may be recommended by the doctor. The best thing any patient can do is ask questions before a new test or screening is performed.

- "Is this covered by Medicare?"
- "Will I have a co-pay?"
- "Does the hospital waive fees for people with a low-income?"
- "What are my options?"

When people ask questions, they can make informed decisions about what they need, don't need, and how they want to pay.



Special Olympics benefits
272,000 student athletes
nationwide.

DEPT. OF EDUCATION WILL NOT DROP FUNDING FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Self-advocates and allies rumbled by suggested language in the United States Department of Education's budget that seeks to eliminate federal funding for the Special Olympics.

Departments within the federal government are working hard to build budgets for the upcoming fiscal year. Once drafts are completed, they're reviewed by Senate and House Committees on Appropriations. Amidst this process, the [proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget for the Department of Education](#) (DOE) has raised quite a stir.

In what Betsy Devous described as a "heavy decision," the DOE listed Special Olympics as one of 29 programs slated for elimination. Collectively, these cuts would be to save \$6.7 billion dollars a year starting 2020.

Congress and the public expressed dismay that the Administration would zero out support for the popular sports program founded in the 60's by Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

In an abrupt reversal, President Donald Trump [announced Thursday, March 28, 2019 that the federal government will not stop funding Special Olympics.](#)

Many other programs that aid students in low-income households and students with disabilities are at risk. Some programs were not given an increase against inflation, while others may see funding reduced or end entirely.

Programs that may be cut include ...

- Impact Aid
- Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults
- Special Institutions for Persons with Disabilities
- Student Aid
- Research in Special Education

... and programs that may be terminated...

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Alaska Native Education
- Arts in Education
- Comprehensive Literacy Development Grants
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants
- Full-Service Community Schools
- Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs
- Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need
- Innovative Approaches to Literacy
- Native Hawaiian Education
- Promise Neighborhoods
- Ready to Learn Programming
- Special Olympics Education Programs
- Statewide Family Engagement Centers
- Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants
- Supported Employment State Grants

- Teacher Quality Partnership

For more information about the Special Olympics termination [read the article by TIME.](#)

WHAT'S UP, UNDER THE BIG DOME?

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



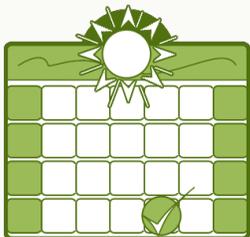
The 2020 budget is quite possibly the hottest topic at the Statehouse. House Representatives have approved sending of \$6.1 billion dollars, a plan that now moves to the Senate for consideration.

There are a number of new bills that affect Vermonters with disabilities. Some bills have garnered a lot of excitement, while other bills are slow-moving and may not “come off the wall” to be considered by a committee. Among the many bills, some to watch are:

- **H. 140** asks that the [Special Education Advisory Council](#) have a majority of members who are people with disabilities or family members of people with disabilities, as required by federal law.
- **H. 183** and **S.5** relate to the involuntary sterilization of people with disabilities. Although this is the second session to see bills related to this issue, action by a committee is unlikely.
- **H. 312** mandates that all Vermont movie theaters host opportunities to view open-captioned films.
- **H. 332** establishes an annual "Developmental Disabilities Independence Day" on November 17 to commemorate the closing of the Brandon Training School. Advocates plan to pursue this through a Governor's Proclamation, rather than legislative action.
- **S. 48** authorizes people with temporary disabilities to hunt wild game from their vehicles.

Contact Sue, VTDDC's Senior Planner and Policy Analyst, by email for more details on what the Council is doing this legislative session:

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SAVE THE DATE for the next Quarterly Meeting

When: Thursday, June 27, 2019

Where: Location to be Announced

Council members work together to increase awareness about the needs of Vermonters with disabilities and 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.

that bring people with developmental disabilities, and their families,
into the heart of Vermont Communities.