

Vermonters can **GROW** savings without losing disability benefits.

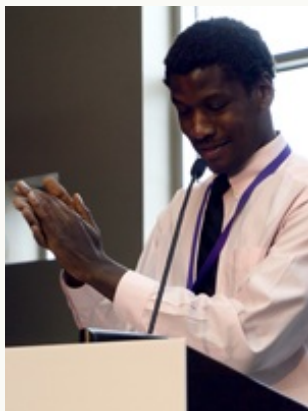
VermontABLE allows eligible residents with disabilities to plan and save for their futures without risking needs-based benefits. Individuals and family-members may save up to \$15,000 yearly and enjoy tax-free earnings.

[Take the Eligibility Quiz](#)

Produced and distributed by the [Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council](#).



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 RECOGNIZED AT NATIONAL DISABILITY CONFERENCE

Developmental Disabilities Council members and staff from across the nation came together in early July to celebrate diversity, learn from each other, and honor outstanding individuals who have dedicated their lives to advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.

Sponsored by the National Association of Developmental Disabilities Councils (NACDD), the New Orleans event put Vermont front and center as Max Barrows, Outreach Director for [Green Mountain Self-Advocates](#) became the sixth recipient of the prestigious Champions of Equal Opportunity Self-Advocacy Award. The award recognizes those who embrace the values of the federal DD Act: inclusion, independence, productivity, and self-determination.

Vermonters attending the conference shouted their hoots and congratulations as Max gave his acceptance speech.

"I take pride as a black person with autism and use it to speak up for myself and others. People see what we have to offer within each other and they believe in us."

- Max Barrows, Champion of Equal Opportunity

As a display of Barrows' unique ability to bring people together, he also hosted an early morning roundtable where self-advocates and allies came to talk about the status of the self-advocacy movement in their home state or territory. Under the federal DD



Three self-advocates received induction

Act, Councils must support self-advocacy.

certificates appointing them to the Self-Advocate Leadership Circle.

Other Vermonters who attended the conference included VTDDC's own David Frye, Chelsea Hayward, Kirsten Murphy, Courtney Quinlan, and Crista Yagjin, as well as Green Mountain Self-Advocates' Administrative Director Karen Topper.

VTDDC gives a heartfelt congratulations to Max Barrows, April Dunn, and Kristyn Herbert.



The PowerPoint slides viewed at the hearings are gradually uploaded to the DDSD website as .pdfs.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES PAYMENT REFORM SPARKS QUESTIONS

The Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) hosted a public meeting on July 16 to discuss the recommendations made in a recent study of the rates paid to designated and specialized service agencies.

Establishing the cost basis for rates in one piece of a complex overhaul of financial arrangements and reporting requirements in the developmental disabilities system, explained Department Director Clare McFadden.

McFadden and consultant Stephen Pawlowski of Burns and Associates, Inc. which built the recommended rates, described the study to a packed room of concerned self-advocates, family members, and allies. Key points in the presentation included:

- Provider agencies can expect wages to be uniform statewide. The State's payment for and the agency's delivery of services will also be the same throughout the State.
- Person-centered planning and the expectation that service plans will be tailored to the individual receiving support will not change.
- Potential benefits of using the new rate structure include the ability to explain clearly to legislators how funds appropriated for developmental services are used and to justify adjusting this appropriation based on changing costs.
- The rates build in funding for necessary activities like training and supervision, which cannot be directly billed to Medicaid.

Through-out the presentation people voiced concerns about the cost of change and its impact on services, employee turnover, gaps in service due to workforce shortages, and variation in services across Vermont's 14 counties. McFadden assured attendees that as changes are proposed by the Department the goal will continue to be increased accountability and the fair use of resource across the system.

Public input about the proposed rates is being accepted until August 16, 2019. Comments should be sent to DSPaymentReform@burnshealthpolicy.com

VTDDC staff are happy to assist.

Would you like to know about more opportunities to listen and give feedback on payment reform? Email Lisa Parro (lisa.parro@vermont.gov) and ask her to add your name to the list for future presentations. You can also listen to a

[webinar by DAIL Senior auditor Jennifer Perkins](#) that reviews the June 16 material.

For more information about the meeting, materials, and presentations, visit the Agency of Human Services' [Developmental Disabilities Services Division's website](#).



The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council created a Public Service Announcement last fall to remind people with disabilities to vote. [Give it a listen on Youtube.](#)

NEARLY HALF OF ALL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES VOTED IN THE PREVIOUS ELECTION

A [nationwide study has concluded that more people with disabilities voted in 2018 than in either of the last two mid-term elections \(2014 and 2010\)](#).

The study, which was conducted by [Rutgers, School of Management and Labor Relations](#), reported that 49.3% of Americans with disabilities successfully voted in 2018, compared to 54% of people without disabilities. Employed people with disabilities were just as likely as employed people without disabilities to vote, suggesting that employment helps bring people with disabilities into mainstream political life.

People with disabilities who did not vote in 2018 cited reasons that included a lack of transportation, schedule conflicts, and the disability itself. These barriers can be overcome with careful planning. Transportation should never stop you from getting to the polls and/or [getting your early/absentee ballot and mailing it from home](#). So, [contact your town clerk](#) and register today, and don't forget to save the date! The 2020 Elections will take place on November 3, 2020.

45.1% of Vermonters with disabilities voted in 2018, shrinking the voting gap with non-disabled voters from 13% to 11.2%

Rutgers estimates that if there could be as many voters with disabilities as there are voters without disabilities, there would be an extra 2.35 million Americans casting ballots in the upcoming 2020 election.

For more information [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...and in the summer, we also take note of national policy issues.



In July, Vermont saw two exciting milestones in the development of its ABLE Savings Program.

Total participation in [VermontABLE](#) reached 300 active accounts. That

means 300 Vermonters with disabilities are taking advantage of this new opportunity to save money without jeopardizing crucial benefits like Medicaid and Social Security.

“It has been challenging to shift people’s thinking,” explained VTDDC’s Director Kirsten Murphy. “Parents and self-advocates have been told for so long that saving money will mean losing the supports they need. But it seems like the word is getting out.”

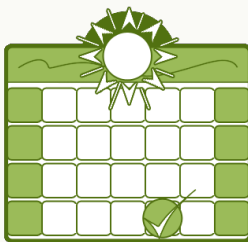
Vermont enrollment in ABLE, as a percent of population, is ahead of many other states, Murphy said. She credits the strong partnership between the VTDDC and State Treasurer Beth Peace, who oversees the Vermont program.

Don’t have an account yet? [Take the Eligibly Quiz](#) or [talk to someone about qualifying](#) and open your accounts today!

In other ABLE news, Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy recently signed on as a sponsor of the [ABLE Age Adjustment Act](#), which would expand ABLE programs to people who acquired a disability later in life, up to the age of 46. This would open the program to people with late onset neurological conditions like MS, veterans, and many others.

VTDDC has long advocated that the Vermont delegation sign on to this important bill. Please send thanks to Senator Leahy. And let's get everyone on board. [Contact Senator Bernie Sanders by filling out a legislative comments form](#) and [Representative Peter Welsh](#), and ask them to co-sign this invaluable piece of legislation. Tell them you support the ABLE Age Adjustment Act, and you'd like them to co-sign for it too.

Contact Sue, VTDDC's Senior Planner and Policy Analyst, by email and see what else the Council is up to: Susan.Aranoff@Vermont.gov



SAVE THE DATE for the next Quarterly Meeting

When: Thursday, September 26, 2019

Where: [Hannaford Technical Center](#), Middlebury, VT

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.

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