

Vermont Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, DeafBlind Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

November 16, 2023

9:30am-12:00am

Virtual Meeting via ZoomGov

Welcome/Housekeeping/Announcements

This marks our bimonthly meeting for the Deaf Hard of Hearing DeafBlind Advisory Council with Laura hosting and Will serving as the Chair. We're pleased to welcome Angela Smith, our guest speaker from DAIL, who will provide an update about Age Strong Vermont. Will will made adjustments to the agenda accordingly.

Additionally, we want to acknowledge Kelly Decker, who has been a representative for the interpreting population. Regrettably, she is unable to continue her role within the council. However, she is actively collaborating with us to find a suitable replacement. We currently have a potential replacement to represent the interpreting vacancy, and once we reach out to them, we will keep you informed about their decision.

Age Strong VT Plan Update – Angela Smith-Dieng

Angela Smith Dieng, Director of the Adult Services Division at DAIL. She has been leading the creation of a Multi Sector Plan on Aging for Vermont. They have launched the draft on November 1st for public comment throughout this month. *A slide presentation was shown to the Council*, and details can be found on the Age Strong website: [Age Strong Vermont: Our Roadmap for an Age-Friendly State](#) and the [Vermont's Multisector Plan on Aging, Draft For Public Comment, November 1, 2023](#).

The plan, aligned with the Older Vermonters Act of 2020, aims to combat ageism, and reshape our view positively. It covers various aspects like the economy, environment, housing, transportation, equity, and social inclusion, unfolding as a 10-year vision with specific objectives and strategies. Their work began in 2021 with an advisory committee, surveys, public sessions, and collaboration with other states.

Recently, we initiated a rebranding effort as Age strong Vermont, (on this episode of [WCAX's Across the Fence](#)), accompanied by a monthly newsletter.

Presenting detailed strategies and objectives listed for the Multi-Sector Plan on Aging: Affordable Aging, Healthy Aging for All, Social Connection is Key, Infrastructure for the Future (Housing, Transportation, and Community Design), Valuing Family Care Partners, The Fight for Justice, and Strengthening Systems of Support.

In December, public feedback will shape the final plan, reviewed by the advisory committee. The plan launches in January, spanning the next 10 years. We'll kick off 2024 by forming implementation committees, defining outcomes, creating a data dashboard, and identifying key strategies. Reach out to

agestrongvt@vermont.gov or join the monthly newsletter for updates. Help us make Vermont a thriving state! Angela seeks the Council for feedback on the plan's clarity, resonance, compelling aspects, and any suggestions for improvement.

Do they provide training for effective communication with individuals who are hard of hearing or late deafened? This will be integrated into the Strengthening Systems of Support section, outlining specific environmental, acoustic, and physical strategies to facilitate respectful communication. Our overarching state plan on aging includes considerations for environmental adjustments to support those who are hard of hearing, especially in settings like senior centers.

Is there specialized training for staff working with individuals who are deaf and use sign language? We propose incorporating insights from the state plan on aging into the Age Strong Vermont plan, ensuring inclusivity by hiring interpreters. Additionally, we suggest adding hearing and vision screenings as part of services for older Vermonters, offering preventive measures against falls.

Furthermore, there's a need to educate primary care providers to implement screening measures for social isolation and mental health issues, with the potential to refer individuals to appropriate resources. Emphasizing the role of primary care providers in screening for dementia is crucial, aiming to increase local diagnostic capacity rather than relying solely on specialized memory centers with lengthy waiting lists.

Addressing the unique challenges faced by the deaf community, we propose exploring alternatives to residential care facilities, possibly through monthly gatherings or shared living arrangements. A study is underway to evaluate the feasibility of such alternatives, drawing inspiration from models in other states.

Anticipated recommendations from this study align with the goals of Age Strong Vermont, particularly in fostering inclusivity for the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind populations. For regular hearing tests, we recommend engaging qualified audiologists, emphasizing the importance of proactive screenings, especially as individuals age.

HireAbility services, available to individuals of any age seeking employment support and accommodations, aim to facilitate conversations and assistance. For inquiries or feedback, please reach out to Laura or Angela. The ongoing commitment to Age Strong Vermont ensures continued collaboration with the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities. Your valuable input is appreciated, and we encourage ongoing dialogue to enhance our efforts.

Program/Organizational updates

Sherry Sousa - Co-Chair of the School Age Subcommittee

Today I am meeting with some senators who are looking at some legislation that may be helpful to this group around identifying some regional groups meeting the needs of our students that are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, as well as other needs.

November 6th, we did have our Coalition meeting with 52 participants looking at assessing the quality of our deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind programs. We are meeting on January 10th from 3 to 5:00 in Waterbury to look at data and how we collect data. All of the presentations from the November 16th meeting are available and are on the website. If you want to email Sherry or Spenser with your

comments. The one thing Sharon's really asking for is some clarity on the members in terms of who can be invited and who can participate (addressing the conflict-of-interest issue around the UVM CARES team participating in the school subcommittee). I'll send that your way.

Spenser clarifies - there was no conflict- back when Linda and Bill were Chair and the subcommittees it was determined that people who were not members of the council could participate in the subgroup committees by invite, especially if they were subject matter experts or had knowledge to contribute to the subgroup.

Present Day, if the committee feel there are people not members of the council would be beneficial to contributing as part of the subcommittee, feel free to invite them to participate in the subcommittee. Which will be put up by law on the Council website of the subcommittee work so the names will be listed on them so people will know who these people are.

And this is Laura. I put a link in the chat just FYI if anyone's curious to look at the presentation. So, the captions will be added later. I need to kind of modify a couple of things. There were some incorrect captions, so we're going to fix that up. But as soon as it's cleaned up, I will post that, as well. So the transcript should be cleaned up and added eventually.

Break

Val Hughes- VCIL- Deaf Independent Coordinator at Vermont Center for independent Living
I've been actively involved in various initiatives, particularly focusing on emergency alerts. My concern stems from a personal experience during a fire in Montpelier when I was at a friend's place. The fire was right behind us, and we only became aware when we saw the sirens. Unfortunately, the emergency alert didn't go off until almost an hour later. This raises significant concerns about community notification during critical events. The situation in Lewiston, Maine, in October was similarly distressing, with people I knew affected. It underscores the urgent need to enhance our alert systems. Wishing everyone a wonderful Thanksgiving and good health.

Rebecca Chalmers: Emergency alerts: I encourage you to contact Karl.Hayden@vermont.gov who is the OSHA contact at the State of Vermont and ask him how OSHA is and can help VT employers implement OSHA's policies:

“OSHA's policy is:...2. to strive for working conditions which will safeguard the safety and health of all workers, including those with special needs and limitations.” per OSHA's [1997 memo](#)

“OSHA encourages employers to adopt additional, prudent measures to ensure that disabled employees or employees who require assistance are safely evacuated in case of fire or like emergency” per OSHA's [2002 memo](#)

OSHA jurisdiction puts the responsibility on the employer to be proactive in planning for those with disabilities or communication differences. I am pushing the concept of good systemwide improvements because that can build change, much faster than individual ADA asks that never improve overall safety.

I encourage everyone to ask your own employer to ask them how they are following OSHA's policies of ensuring that disabled employees are safely evacuated in case of emergency.

Jessica Hutchins- VANCRO lead program manager for Interpreting Services

The Vermont SSP program is experiencing positive growth, particularly with an increased number of non-signing deafblind participants benefiting from our services. However, the demand for SSPs it is outpacing our current capacity, necessitating additional support to meet the needs across Vermont.

Laura Siegel recommended adding a FAQ section to the website to better inform those unfamiliar with SSP roles and responsibilities.

In terms of interpreter updates, we're witnessing growth with interpreters relocating to Vermont. Our Vermont apprenticeship program for interpreters has successfully facilitated the integration of three interpreters who have committed to staying for at least four months, working closely with in-person mentors who are established Vermont interpreters. Another cohort of apprentice interpreters is set to begin in the coming months.

We're excited to announce a partnership with UVM Medical Center, where we are now contracted to provide interpreting services based on their requests. Additionally, a recent contract with Brattleboro Memorial Hospital allows us to offer emergency on-call interpreting services during off-hours through the VANCRO system.

In a move towards greater autonomy, VANCRO is now able to provide Continuing Education Units (CEUs) in-house, offering increased flexibility for professional development.

David Krueger – President, Vermont Association of the Deaf

Town Hall meetings proved to be invaluable, providing us with a better understanding of the current state of affairs within our deaf community.

Here are some upcoming events:

- The Brattleboro Deaf Club is hosting its annual Thanksgiving dinner this Saturday.
- Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Service is hosting their annual soup festival/silent auction on December 9th.
- The Vermont Association of the Deaf is planning a polar bear plunge as a fundraising event to support deafblind interpreting in our state.

To stay updated, visit our [website](http://deafVermonters.com) at deafVermonters.com. While we initially used Facebook, it seems that the platform is not as widely used, so if you do visit our Facebook page, you'll be automatically redirected to our website.

Deb Charlea Baker – Vermont HLAA

Our meeting in September was fantastic, featuring presentations from Lise Hamlin and Carla Beyer-Smolin, who spearheads advocacy and legislative efforts in Washington. They provided the group with a comprehensive overview of the history of HLAA, which originated as SHHH (Self-Help for the Hard of Hearing). Moving forward, we plan to hold meetings every other month, with the exception of this month. Stay tuned for our upcoming newsletter.

Excitingly, we've established a subcommittee dedicated to a crucial project improving access to emergency communications. Updates on this initiative will be shared soon.

Linda Hazard - EHDI/PIP

The EHDI grants, a 5-year proposal submitted to the Health Resources and Services Administration, focuses on screening hearing by one month, identifying children with hearing issues by three months, and initiating early intervention by six months. This was due on November 6th. Family-to-Family support, especially during the transition from identification to early intervention, is a key aspect. EHDI is exploring screenings for children under three, collaborating across the state for timely assessment at ages 1, 2, and 3.

The last focus of this grant is around language assessments of children and Vermont is ahead of the game on this because we're partnering with the University of Colorado in Boulder on a project for language assessments. And we've been collecting the data for about two years now and will continue to do that. One of the pieces that Vermont has that makes it very easy is that part C and EHDI are closely related. We have a single point of entry which makes it easier than what happens in other states.

The second EHDI area involves de-identified data for 2022 births. Vermont, chosen by the CDC, reports on 179 categories. We are one of 39 states that were chosen to participate in that study. Michelle Johns, President of Vermont Hands and Voices, attended the Hands and Voices leadership conference, and I would like for her to share her insights with the council.

The CMV 10th conference in Salt Lake City discussed screening for cytomegalovirus, a potential addition to Vermont's Newborn Screening Profile. Several states have moved towards CMV screening across the country with Minnesota being the lead for the blood spot screening. Doing universal screening every baby in their state through the blood spot and then, for any child who has a positive outcome, they will then confirm with a urine sample, as well. If someone is pregnant and is CMV positive, it can lead to some challenges with the fetus and some pretty significant ones that include blindness, deafness, neurological, autism. We're seeing more cases, there are about 6,000 to 8,000 babies per year in the US that are identified with CMV.

Targeted screening is currently done at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and Vermont medical Center. Three infants were identified with CMV in the past year. A council member, Tracy Hinck, may join the committee, and inclusion in the Annual Legislative Report is under consideration.

There is a committee here in Vermont that is working together that includes parents, professionals, across the stakeholders and looking at this as a possibility of eventually, hopefully, coming under administrative rules. So, in Vermont and the US, there's something called the Regional Unified Screening Protocol. So, when CMV is added to the RUST, that would bring us to, look at, adding it to our Newborn Screening Profile. However, there are still some screenings being done already.

To prevent CMV transmission, measures include handwashing hands after changing diapers, avoiding kissing infants on the mouth, and not sharing food. Moderna is exploring a vaccine for CMV, expected in about 5 years.

Deb Charlea Baker – Accessibility Subcommittee on Emergency Communications Access

Our inaugural meeting took place on November 7th, with committee members including Michelle, Laura, Val, Kate, Bill, and myself. During our first session, we conducted a comprehensive inventory of advocacy efforts. Each member had reached out to various sources in an attempt to secure accessibility for disaster communications in July. It became evident in our discussions that there is a crucial need for

a designated point person (whether in the Governor's office or emergency management department) and this individual's name and contact information should be readily available.

Accessibility is imperative, particularly concerning captioning and interpreters. We stressed the importance of having interpreters who do not obscure the message with half-visible gestures, proposing the use of a Picture-in-Picture (PIP) format with a designated area on the screen for the interpreter.

Two noteworthy pieces of legislation are currently under consideration in Congress:

[S. 2494](#) **Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act of 2023 (CVTA)**: This act is in discussion to make captioning mandatory for all videos.

Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion for Disasters Act (S. 1049): READDI for Disasters Act.

Our action steps include:

Drafting a petition: We plan to reach out to the coalition advocating for hearing aids to be covered by insurance, inquiring about the number of members who faced challenges accessing emergency communications this summer. We aim to gather signatures to emphasize the significance of the issue.

Drafting proposals for the legislative report: We intend to propose comprehensive suggestions for better communication access during emergencies, aiming for global dissemination.

Our upcoming meeting is scheduled for December 4th at 11:00.

Laura: For any subcommittees formed, especially those related to the council, please ensure Sabine Perry's involvement, and designate her as responsible for initiating and coordinating accommodations. You are not required to cover the costs of your virtual platform account; I am available to host those meetings, so feel free to rely on my support. If there are any documents you need to upload to the website and you're unsure about incorporating accessibility features, to ensure compliance, I am more than willing to provide guidance on that matter.

Ralph: Couldn't we have a directory for all of the different services, emergency services that people might need? If there is an emergency and how to reach out to them effectively? And a central place like, go to the Winston Prouty Center to get referrals, to get resources, to get what you need. FYI- Lisa Whitney, Winston Prouty Center, she is their campus maintenance department and oversees all of the buildings and rentals there. Lisa said, anybody in the community deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, if you need rooms to rent for meetings, that is also spaces they have available for our community at the fourth floor of Holton Hall. She is also committed to partnering with the deaf community, the Austine Museum to keep it up and running.

[D/HH/DB Director Update – Laura Siegel](#)

Kate Parrish and I have been working together related to an RFP. The flooding incident, there was no ASL video, no blog out there. VANCRO's contract did not mention making video productions, media productions. Now, we have this RFP so that at any point in time if videos are needed to be made for any state division department, they can work with VANCRO.

I'm working with the Adult Services Division with the State of Vermont. We're currently working on communication access templates. As of right now, one for hospitals in the Southern part of the state Bennington and Brattleboro. We're starting off with them as pilots to develop more of a centralized case management, especially for discharging patients to make sure they have the after care they need, and they have communication access needs while they're transitioning to whatever community-based services or home that go into after discharge.

I am working with the Office of Veterans Affairs. We are going to create a document to really guide Veterans about what organizations are out there. What hearing benefits are, and what options are for anyone hard of hearing. On an ongoing basis we will be doing more presentations and more outreach and being involved with various activities for Veterans Affairs to make sure they're getting what they need.

I partnered with Linda Li a NFI social worker based in Burlington, Vermont. We provided two workshops, and many attended. Gave us great feedback, wonderful conversation, and questions.

I'm currently doing a two-year project called Certificate for Public Management through the University of Vermont CAPS program. We're looking for the EEO officers statewide to collect a list for all of the departments of HR to make sure we have all of the people and the players listed out.

I'm doing a lot of collaborative efforts, specifically about increasing awareness and supports for mental health. We have a draft problem statement that Megan and I have been working on. It has gone to stakeholders it'll eventually go to the legislature for their review and feedback to see what we could possibly establish for more stable services for the deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind population, and specifically around mental health.

I have several presentations lined up. Some are for target populations, like call centers, teaching them really how to use the relay service appropriately. What to do, what's appropriate when interacting with our community. Kate Parrish and I are also co-presenting to an audience of tax professionals. We're educating them how to work with our population, how to provide accommodation, how to hire the right people for these accommodations.

I'm working with the Secretary of State's office specifically their Elections Division trying to figure out how to resolve communication access problems at polling places. I'm talking with various Dispatch Agencies for non-emergency calls and 911 calls. I visited one in Montpelier. And tomorrow, I'm going to one in Westminster. I just want to see what dispatch agencies are doing behind the scenes to get a sense of how they're going about accessibility.

I'm also working with Vermont Department of Health, trying to assess how we can do an even better job with data collection within their specific departments? Department of Fish and Wildlife and they are hosting throughout the summer once a month series for people of any age, any hearing loss, any Vermonter who is here who really wants to learn more about how to fish, how to do some archery, how to do bow hunting.

CARE Model Innovations, specifically AARP CVS grant. We had 15 come in for applications, a lot of review process, it's quite a program getting these grants out to these people. Working with them on that.

I also have met with Tracy Dolan, Director of Refugees Immigration Services to provide her assistance with the limited English Proficiency Policy (LEP) she is overseeing with the Agency of Human Services. Making sure that communication access is really addressed in terms of captioning, CART, ASL interpretation, etcetera.

UVM Medical Center reached out to me to provide some technical assistance for their cultural leadership and guidelines for medical providers about how to interact with our population.

At the Legislative report I had drafted a legislative proposal around communication access money, the \$50,000 that we had requested. If you can, when you're doing this, come up with funding ideas for communication access. So, in the past 2 1/2 years, I've already brought this at least four times. Two times to do Legislative proposals and then, also, two times for DAIL funding. And all four times, I have been denied. So, any ideas about funding? How can we access it? What is needed for? So, things like access to non-ADA events or access to pay for interpreters for small businesses who can't otherwise afford it. What do we need funds for and how do we get that? Let's put that in the report and really see if we can push for more funding. So again, with your annual report, just make mention of those financial needs.

From January to November, I've gotten 168 referrals for various needs and questions.

[Will Pendlebury – AHS-DAIL VR](#)

I'm circulating a flyer from the Disability Rights Group announcing public sessions hosted by the board. They have engaged a consultant to specifically address communities and enhance healthcare within them. Vermonters are actively sought after for input, focusing on hospital, primary care, and engaging with providers and community members. The Vermont Disability Council and Vermont Independent Living Council are organizing a session on Tuesday, November 21st, with a short turnaround, taking place next week from 10am until noon. Registration is required. Laura will be one of the panelists of this session, and you can contact her for information or questions. I strongly encourage participation to share your healthcare experiences in Vermont and provide insights on areas for improvement.

Commissioner's Report

Megan Tierney-Ward Deputy Commissioner

None

Agenda topic

9:30 – Welcome, Announcements, Reminders - **Will Pendlebury (Spenser will be late)**

9:35 – Age Strong VT Plan Update – **Angela Smith-Dieng**

10:35 - Break

10:45 – General Updates (5 minutes each)

- a. VCIL – Val Hughes
- b. VANCRO – Jessica Hutchins
- b. VTAD – David Krueger
- c. HLAA – Deb Baker

d. EHDI – Linda Hazard

11:05 – School Age Subcommittee Updates – **Sherry Sousa**

11:15 – Captioning and Interpreting Subcommittee Updates- **Deb Baker**

11:25 - Director of D/HH/DB Update – **Laura Siegel**

11:40 – Council Business - **All**

- a. 2024 Meetings
- b. Legislative Report focus/Topics
- c. Future presenters

11:55 - Public Comment

12:00 - Adjourn

Public Comment

None

Council Business/Conversations:

None

Other Business/Closing

- Invite Michelle John to do her presentation from Grand Rapids and a council member could join the committee for CMV
- Possible May or June opportunity for an in-person meeting
- Add Mental Health Services to the Council's Annual Report
- Spenser will send out a draft of the legislative report to the Council
- Next meeting – January 18, 2023, from 9:30am -12:00pm

Council Attendance

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spenser Weppler (Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Julie Porter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Krueger
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Will Pendlebury (Co-Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kate Parrish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Hudson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cassie Santo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ralph Gallo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Megan Tierney-Ward	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Chalmers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracy Hinck	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Sharon Henry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Linda Hazard	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amelia Briggs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deb Charlea Baker	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sherry Sousa	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Lalanne	<input type="checkbox"/>

Guest Attendance

Name	Organization
Elizabeth Fox	Interpreter
Kristal Hiers	Interpreter
Jessica Hutchins	Vancro
Michelle John	VT H&V
Diane Scott	White Coat Captioning
Sabine Perry	AOE
Valerie Hughes	VCIL
Laura Siegel	DAIL