

# Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind Advisory Council

January 21, 2021

Zoom Video Conference

9:30-12:00

## ATTENDEES

**Board Members:** AJ Van Tassel, Amelia Briggs, Amy Williamson, Bill Hudson, Deb Charlea Baker, Julie Stefanski, Kate Parish, Laura Siegel, Linda Hazard, Ralph Gallo, Monica Hutt, Rebecca Chalmers, Sharon Henry, Sherry Sousa, Spenser Weppler, Susan Kimmerly, William Pendlebury

**Guests:** Liz Perreault, Margaret Overman, Kelly Decker, Caelan Manning, Angela Smith-Dieng

**Interpreters:** Elizabeth Fox, Kristal Hier, White Coat Captioning

### **Council Governance:**

#### **Will Pendlebury and Liz Perreault**

The council was asked to nominate and vote for a person to fill the chair position that is held for the next two year. Spenser Weppler, who is the current chair, was nominated for a second term. The council voted unanimously to appoint Spenser to a second term as chair with one abstention

### **Updates:**

#### **D/HH/DB Services Director Position-**

##### **Monica Hutt**

Monica Hutt updated the council that the hiring committee were interviewing five candidates. The hiring committee would like to advance at least two candidates to the second interview. The council will have an opportunity to meet the second-round candidates once they are determined.

The hiring committee: Fred Jones, Director of DBVI; Megan Tierney-Ward, DAIL Deputy Commissioner; Monica Hutt, DAIL Commissioner; Liz Perreault, DAIL Executive Assistant; Will Pendlebury, DAIL VR staff and council co-chair; Spenser Weppler, council chair.

### **VCIL-**

#### **Will Pendlebury and Laura Siegel**

The Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) is in full support of the hearing aid bill that is being proposed this legislative session.

**VIRS-****Will Pendlebury**

Vermont Interpreter Referral Service (VIRS) has been working under VCIL for the past five years but VCIL will not pursue the VIRS contract when it goes up for renewal. Another update is Bill Bliss, who heads VIRS, is resigning.

**VAD-****Laura Siegel**

The Vermont Retail and Grocers Association wrote accessibility tips and a guidebook on how to improve their business and organization's customer service for people that are deaf or hard of hearing. These materials were given to the Agency of Commerce to distribute to their partners.

Laura met with the Department of Mental Health to discuss the roadblocks that exist in accessing mental health services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Laura also interviewed a doctor who is deaf and a nurse about the vaccinations and COVID-19. You can find that interview here. [Interview Video](#)

**HLAA VT Chapter-****Deb Baker**

- The Vermont chapter will be involved with this year's coalition.
- The first virtual chapter meeting was on December 7, 2020, and it went well. The meetings occur the first Wednesday of every month, beginning at 1:00 P.M.
- Upcoming topic for the chapter is captioning and how it is the onramp to information for people that are hard of hearing.
- If people are interested in getting brochures, visit the national HLAA website ([haringloss.org](http://haringloss.org)) to download a variety of materials.
- The Hearing Aid Bill is a focus for the chapter this session.

**VT EHDI-****Linda Hazard**

- All EHDI employees have been deployed to man UVMMC COVID-19 phone lines.
- Currently, only essential services are being provided.
- The tracking and surveillance of babies is still happening.
- The empathy workshop was successful.

**Nine East Network-****Linda Hazard**

Nine East continues to provide both remote and in person services.

## **Legislative Updates:**

### **Hearing Aid Coverage- Rebecca Chalmers and Julie Stefanski**

If there are council members who would like to help advocate for the hearing aid bill, please contact Ruby Baker at COVE. The coalition is looking for more people to help move this bill forward.

Senator Lyons is taking the lead on the bill in the Senate and Theresa Woods is helping this bill move through the House. If you would like to follow this bill you can find it here. [H.266 Hearing Aid Bill](#)

The council would like to invite Cory Gustafson to a meeting and hear what DVHA's thoughts are on this bill.

### **Other Bills of Interest to the Council:**

**Captioning provided in movie theaters-** This bill was introduced last year and did not move through. It does not appear to be a bill that will be introduced this year.

### **State Plan on Aging Survey Results-**

#### **Angela Smith-Dieng, Adult Services Director**

Every four years, DAIL submits a State Plan on Aging. In the last plan, work to combat social isolation was a priority. However, COVID-19 temporarily halted that work in 2020. Once the pandemic subsides, that work will again continue.

A new state plan is due FFY 2023 and will be in place until FFY 2026. To gather information for the upcoming plan, a needs assessment was sent out by Flint Springs Associates. There were 2,716 Vermonters who are 60 years old and older, and 357 family caregivers who responded. These surveys were available online and hardcopy.

The following is information Angela Smith-Dieng shared in her Power Point.

#### **Summary of Survey Findings- Vermonters 60+**

- Perception: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, older Vermonters felt they were living the life they desired most of the time.
- Health: More than 50% of older Vermonters report their physical health has impacted their ability to live life as desired.
- Home: The vast majority (91%) of older Vermonters responding to this survey live in their own home.
- Transportation: 83% of older Vermonters drive their own car, making the ease of getting to friends, shopping, appointments, etc., relatively simple.
- Income: More than three-quarters of Vermonters age 60+ rely on Social Security as a source of income. Nearly all older Vermonters have health insurance coverage. One-third report that they have just enough (27%) or not enough (7%) to pay their expenses.
- Planning: Older Vermonters misunderstand how long-term care services, if needed, will be paid for. In response to the question of how people would pay for long term care, should

they need it, nearly half (47%) of respondents identified Medicare as a possible payment option.

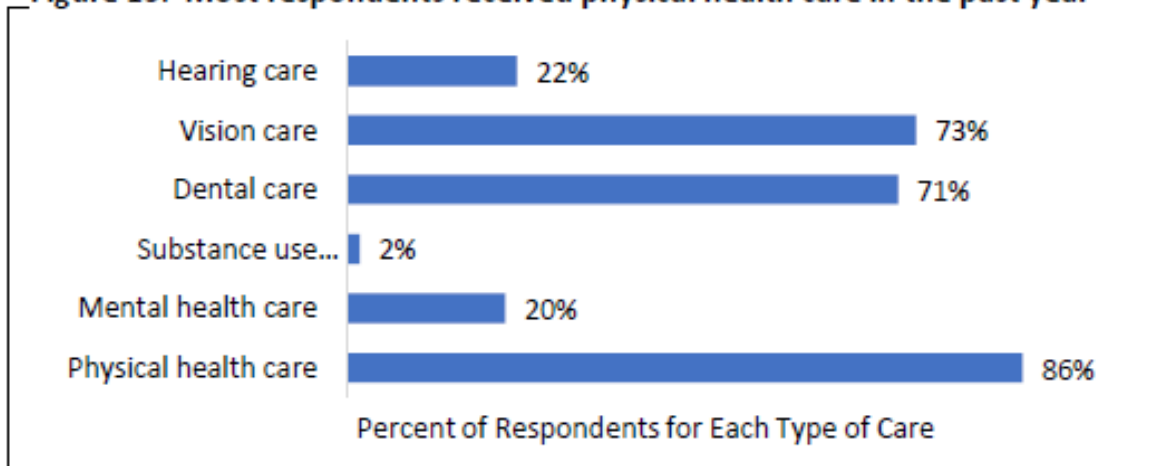
- Nutrition: Food insecurity, as evidenced by use of food programs, is significantly more present in respondents who completed hard copy surveys.
- Awareness: Knowledge of resources focused on older Vermonters varies widely and by specific programs. For example, Respondents were most likely to know about Senior Centers, the local AAA, volunteering, and transportation. They were least knowledgeable about respite care, Adult Protective Services, and legal aid.

### **In the past year, have you seen a professional to assess your need for health care?**

The survey question listed the following types of health care: physical health, mental health, substance use treatment, dental care, vision care, and hearing care.

86% respondents have received physical health care in last year, while only 20% have received mental health care, and 22% hearing care.

**Figure 13: Most respondents received physical health care in the past year**



### **Summary of Survey Findings – Family Caregivers**

- The majority of family caregivers provide care to their family member between 20 hours and round-the-clock on a weekly basis. They devote years of their lives providing care to their family member.
- Family caregiving negatively impacts the caregiver on a range of personal dimensions. Despite these reports of negative impacts, slightly less than a quarter of family caregivers use respite services.
- More than half of family caregivers expressed interest in gaining information and/or education around self-care, medical benefits, long term care and estate planning, and medical conditions.
- Engagement and/or interest in individual counseling or caregiver support groups as a helpful form of support varies.

- Friends, family members, health care providers and the internet are the most common sources of support and information on which family caregivers rely.

The survey is just one step in capturing data. In past years, we were able to have focus groups and hope in the next nine months, we will be able hold those again. Angela would like to come back to the council in the fall with a draft plan for the council to review.

### **Council Planning-**

#### **Potential Presenters and Topics**

- Department of Corrections and the court system
- Department of Vermont Health Access- Medicaid and how it works and the Hearing Aid Bill

#### **Reconvening Age Band Subgroups to Review and Update**

The council discussed bringing back the subgroups. In the past, subgroups did not have the funds or power to move the recommendations forward. While the council looks at reviving the subgroups, there are some questions and information that needs to be gathered before moving forward.

The first step will be to have the original subgroups reconvene and see where things currently stand. Once the groups have met, come back to the full council and report back to the new director what the needs are for each group. The council must decide whether to keep the age band subgroups or have specific topics that the subgroups will address.

The gap analysis should be reviewed by the council then combined into one document to inform the new director of the issues that need to be addressed. Linda Hazard and Monica Hutt have the documents.

#### **Additional Comments-**

Amy Williamson will be stepping down as of March and Kelly Decker will be taking her place on the council. Kelly must apply, and the application will move through to the Governor's office for appointment.

Bill Hudson stepped down as the DAILE Voc. Rehab representative and Kate Parish has stepped into that role. Bill will remain on the council as a representative of the deaf community. He was unanimously voted to fill one of the vacant "Deaf Community Member" seats

#### **Public Comments-**

Margaret Overman is advocating for better classroom acoustics. Vermont does not adhere to the recommended standards for acoustics in school buildings. She is advocating that building codes require new buildings be built adhering to the recommended standards.

**Meeting was adjourned: 11:54**