

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues
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Election 2008: One small action can lead to big results

As we draw closer to the November election, many people may not be planning to exercise their right to vote or be active participants in the political process. Although this is a widespread issue among Americans, it tends to be higher among people with disabilities. Accessibility and other issues can make it more difficult to get involved, but Indiana is making headway and does offer opportunities that may be right for you.

During the 1966 New York City mayoral election, Eunice Fiorito (1930–1999), who became blind as a teen, walked into candidate John Lindsay's office with her specialized typewriter and announced that she was going to help him get elected by volunteering to be his receptionist.

True to her word, Lindsay was elected and Fiorito was one of the first people he sought after winning. He asked her what he could do to repay her for her time and dedication and she responded, "I want you to create the first ever mayor's council for people with disabilities." Lindsay agreed and thus a pioneer in the disability movement was born. A majority of our nation's cities still have similar offices, including some in Indiana, such as Bloomington, Columbus, Indianapolis, Kokomo and Muncie, among others.

If one person with this determination can forever change the landscape of the disability movement, think about the difference you can make by becoming active in the electoral process.

In a national study conducted by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), 40 percent of voters with disabilities have chosen to use absentee ballots. Obstacles such as a lack of transportation or inaccessibility issues at the polls could be the explanation. However, according to Jim Dickson at the AAPD, it's time for those who previously voted absentee to get to the polls and vote in person if possible.

"We've worked hard to make voting accessible for everyone," said Dickson. "If poll workers don't see us — regardless of the disability — using the new machines, the legislators may ask us why they spent all this money on advanced technology."

According to both majority parties in the state of Indiana, there are many ways for people with disabilities to get involved at the ground level. From stuffing envelopes to making phone calls, from working in the polling booths to placing yard signs — anything would be appreciated.

"Getting involved in this election can be as simple as sitting down and figuring out who among family and friends you can talk to about disability issues," Dickson said. "Take that list and make sure those people are registered, are aware of disability legislation and have a state-issued photo ID. Get them ready to vote in solidarity with the disability community." Note that Hoosier voters must be registered by Oct. 6 and obtain a government-issued photo ID to cast their

ballots in November. Visit www.in.gov/sos/elections for registration details and more information.

To learn more about getting involved in the 2008 elections, please use the following resources:

Indiana Democratic Party: Visit www.indems.org and click on the "Take Action" link to fill out a volunteer form. Or call (800) 223-3387 (toll free).

Indiana Republican Party: Visit www.indgop.org or call (800) 466-1087 (toll free) to learn more.

Community level: Visit www.indianavoters.com and click on the "County Contact" link at the bottom of the home page. Or call the Secretary of State's office at (317) 232-6531 (voice).

AAPD: Visit www.aapd.com or call (202) 457-0046 (voice or TTY) or (800) 840-8844 (toll free and TTY).

Fifth Freedom: Visit fifthfreedom.org or call (260) 426-8789 (voice).

Bush signs genetic anti-discrimination act

To prevent health insurers and employers from discriminating against anyone genetically inclined to illnesses, such as cancer or heart disease, President George W. Bush signed the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act in May. The Act passed with overwhelming majorities from both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The legislation was introduced 13 years ago, but did not gain momentum and support until the past year. The bill ultimately will ensure that citizens' genetic information will not be misused by insurance companies.

Health insurers cannot reject coverage or raise premiums based on a family's genetic predisposition to develop disease. In addition, insurers cannot require a genetics test. The law will also prohibit employers from using genetic information in hiring, firing, pay or promotion decisions.

Legislators hope the bill will prevent employees from declining health tests in fear of losing health coverage or even a job. As a result, the law will help citizens benefit from early detections and perhaps minimize the risk of long-term health problems.

'Section 504' creates confusion for schools

Students with physical or cognitive disabilities who do not qualify for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) may find relief with another federal law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which broadens the description for individuals with disabilities who qualify for its protections. However, a recent study found that the broad scope of the federal law may cause confusion among school administrators and parents.

The study was the first to quantify the number of students nationwide who are receiving accommodations through Section 504. Results show that only 1.2 percent of public school students receive services under Section 504, but 12 percent receive services under the IDEA.

Although not as widely used as IDEA, teachers and administrators in some districts prefer to give students with disabilities accommodations based on Section 504 rather than IDEA because qualification for it is broader. They also are not required to do any reporting to the federal government. At the same time, administrators worry that they are providing too many students too many accommodations because Section 504 does not receive any federal assistance to support the costs of additional accommodations, unlike partial government funding which is available for IDEA-eligible students.

To fully qualify for Section 504 services, one must have a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits at least one major life activity, such as learning.” This is sometimes easier to prove than qualification for IDEA, which requires students to fall into one of 13 different disability classifications.

To minimize confusion, school administrators must adopt a careful evaluation and standard protocol throughout the school district when qualifying students for both IDEA and Section 504 accommodations. A more focused effort by schools and administrators will solidify the grounds as to which child belongs in which category, giving full attention and assistance to those in need.

Some graduates eligible for priority Medicaid waiver

High school graduates with disabilities, or students entering their senior year who are enrolled in special education programs, may now explore their eligibility for immediate assistance through a Support Services Medicaid Waiver.

The Support Services Waiver can provide \$13,500 a year in programs and services to people with developmental disabilities. Traditionally, there have been long waiting lists to obtain this type of waiver. Now, however, the state of Indiana is providing the waiver to qualifying young adults leaving special education programs with no need for them to be on a waiting list.

Recent graduates and students who meet Indiana’s disability and financial eligibility requirements for Medicaid may receive the following types of services: respite care, therapies, pre-vocational services, employment supports, adult day services, behavior supports, supports to participate in the community, supports to families or an individual to live at home, family and caregiver training, and transportation.

Families or candidates interested in applying for a priority Medicaid waiver can do so by contacting the Bureau of Developmental Disability Services (BDDS). Local BDDS offices can be found by calling (800) 545-7763 (voice).

To learn more about the Support Services Medicaid Waiver or other Medicaid waivers, contact The ARC of Indiana at (800) 382-9100 (voice).

State health insurance now covers more children

The Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) recently announced that the state of Indiana has gained federal approval to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

According to a press release issued by FSSA, families who earn up to 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or approximately \$53,000 per a family of four, are now eligible for SCHIP coverage. In addition, the expansion calls for year-round eligibility for children, regardless of changes to income, as well as telemedicine benefits. For participants who meet eligibility requirements, coverage will be retroactive as of Jan. 1, 2008 and begin Oct. 1, 2008.

FSSA believes this expansion will provide health care coverage to an additional 10,000 children statewide. The organization expects more than 5,000 children will have coverage within the first year alone.

"We're always looking for ways to improve the health of Hoosiers," said Governor Mitch Daniels in the release. "Now, more kids will have access to health insurance coverage."

The announcement came following a January request from Indiana's FSSA to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) to extend coverage from 200 percent of the FPL to 250 percent.

"I am very happy that we have been able to expand the coverage of SCHIP to help additional children," said Indiana Senator Frank Mrvan, Jr. in the release. "I appreciate working with Secretary Roob to not only extend health care coverage for Hoosiers, but to also enhance their quality of life."

SCHIP was developed nationally by Congress as part of the Federal Balanced Budget Act of 1997 to encourage states to provide uninsured children with health care coverage. In Indiana, SCHIP is part of Hoosier Healthwise, a statewide health insurance program.

To learn more or see if you qualify, please call (800) 889-9949 (toll free) or visit www.in.gov/fssa/ompp.

Bookshare gives free access to online library

August marks the time of year when most children head back to school. This year, a newly renovated Web site will provide students with visual or other print disabilities more ease as they begin their studies. Bookshare.org, an online database hosted by Benetech, allows qualifying students with disabilities free online access to more than 38,000 books and 150 periodicals that can be converted to Braille, large print or text-to-speech audio.

Bookshare.org gives all K-12, post-secondary and graduate students free access to an online library thanks to funding from the Department of Education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Recently, the Office of Special Education Programs awarded Bookshare.org \$32 million over the next five years to expand its online database. The money will allow Bookshare.org to add more than 100,000 new titles for student access.

Through subscriptions, schools and institutions have the capability to download and provide materials to students registered within their accounts.

Organizations within the educational system and the rehabilitation system — along with libraries, specialized nonprofit agencies and various governmental units — can also register with Bookshare.org.

The online community enables individuals to scan and share materials through a special exemption from the U.S. copyright law held by Bookshare.org. This exemption permits the reproduction of publications into specialized formats for individuals with disabilities. For more information, visit www.bookshare.org.

Hoosiers have options for health care assistance

The state of Indiana has several resources available for Hoosiers needing health care support or health care coverage, funded both nationally and locally. The following resources may be especially helpful for those seeking assistance:

- **Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP):** HIP is for uninsured Hoosier adults between the ages of 19–64. Parents or caretaker relatives of children in the Hoosier Healthwise program are likely candidates for HIP. To learn more about eligibility and coverage with HIP, call (877) 438-4479 (toll free) or visit www.in.gov/fssa/hip.
- **Hoosier Healthwise:** Hoosier Healthwise is a health insurance program for Indiana children, pregnant women and low-income families. Health care is provided at little or no cost to participants, including regular check ups, prescriptions, dental care, vision care, family planning services and mental health services. For questions regarding Hoosier Healthwise, call (800) 889-9949 (toll free) or visit www.in.gov/fssa/ompp.
- **State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP):** Congress created SCHIP as a way to encourage states to provide health insurance to uninsured children. Information is available at (800) 889-9949 (toll free) or www.in.gov/fssa/ompp.
- **Medicaid Select:** Medicaid Select is a health insurance program for Medicaid-eligible Hoosiers who are blind, aged and/or have a disability. To learn more, call (877) 633-7353 (toll free) or go to www.medicaidselect.com.

Of Note

Governor appoints new board chair

Governor Daniels has appointed Steve Tilden as the new chair of the Council’s board of directors. Tilden is retired from the Indiana Civil Rights Commission where he served 25 years in a number of departments and positions, most recently as Director of Alternative Dispute Resolution. Tilden is a certified mediator and established the first mediation program in any state civil rights agency. He has served on multiple boards and committees, including the

Governor's Interagency Council for Infants and Toddlers and the Governor's Round Table for Special Education. Tilden is also the father of a deceased child with multiple disabilities.

Community Spirit Awards — last call for entries

Nominations for the Council's Community Spirit Awards are due Friday, Aug. 15. All winners will receive a full scholarship to attend the Council's annual conference and will be recognized during its awards luncheon. For information and/or to submit a nomination, visit www.in.gov/gpcpd. Contact the Council at (317) 232-7770 (voice) or GPCPD@gpcpd.org (e-mail) with questions or to request a print copy of award materials.

National self advocacy conference comes to Indianapolis

Self Advocates of Indiana will host the ninth annual National Self Advocacy Conference Sept. 4–7 at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown. The cost is \$425 per person and free for children ages 9 and under. This fee covers all conference activities, including entertainment and most meals. Optional tours and events, as well as hotel accommodations, are not covered in the cost. For more information and registration, visit www.sabe2008.org or call (877) 431-8532 (toll free). Funding assistance will be available, but limited. Contact Arc of Indiana at (800) 382-9100 (toll free) for further details.

Save the date!

The 2008 Conference for People with Disabilities will take place Tuesday, Dec. 2, and Wednesday, Dec. 3, at the Hyatt Regency hotel in downtown Indianapolis. Plan now to join us for "Mission Ready: Countdown to Change."

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. on target is made available in accessible formats upon request.