



Consumer Advisory Council Meeting

October 1, 2025

10:00am – 12:00pm

Minutes

In Attendance:

Emily Ball
Julie Ball
Linda Barry
Scott Brown
Mary Beth Bruder
Karen Carney
Molly Cole

Tom Cosker
Denise Drummond
Walt Glomb
Kim Mearman
Adrianna Ramirez
Deborah Richards
Cristina Wilson

UCEDD Faculty/Staff in Attendance:

Kate Ascetta

Christine Jozef

Quick recap:

The Consumer Advisory Council meeting focused on discussing funding challenges and advocacy priorities for disability services, with members sharing concerns about government shutdown impacts, healthcare access, and food security issues. The group explored various funding strategies and communication approaches to address budget cuts affecting people with disabilities, including potential state-level funding sources and ways to simplify policy messaging for the public. Members agreed to identify key advocacy priorities and scheduled a final meeting to review progress, while emphasizing the importance of transparency and stakeholder engagement in addressing service impacts.

Summary:

Advocacy Priorities Amid Funding Uncertainty

The Consumer Advisory Council meeting opened with Emily Ball, co-chair, introducing members and discussing the uncertain funding situation due to the government shutdown. Tom Cosker from Disability Rights Connecticut shared that they are preparing for potential funding cuts, particularly in mental health services, and working on 2026 priorities. Molly Cole from the Connecticut State Independent Living Council highlighted concerns about food insecurity and the need for legislative action on supported decision-making. Walt Glomb, Director of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, outlined their priorities, including supporting self-advocacy and increasing engagement with underserved communities, while awaiting funding decisions. The conversation ended with discussions on healthcare access and waiver eligibility challenges for people with developmental disabilities.

Disability Advocacy and Service Challenges

The meeting focused on updates and challenges in disability advocacy and services. Karen Carney shared her personal experiences and concerns about her son with autism and intellectual disabilities, highlighting issues of racial profiling and the lack of suitable programs. Denise Drummond discussed the "yellow envelope" initiative, a communication tool for people with physical and cognitive disabilities, and an upcoming forum on January 14th featuring Brendolyn Fulton addressing racial disparities.

Updates on CT UCEDD Funding and Projects

Mary Beth discussed the challenges faced to the UCEDD due to funding cuts and changes in federal policies, particularly those related to equity and diversity. She highlighted how the UCEDD had to remove certain terms from their projects to comply with new guidelines, despite continuing to pursue similar goals. Mary Beth also provided updates on specific projects, including the Early Childhood Intervention Personnel Center (ECiPC) and the Connecticut Family Stars demonstration project, noting their achievements and the impact of funding cuts. She mentioned ongoing efforts to secure emergency funding and continue their work, including through a postdoc and social media campaigns. She discussed the delay in implementing an integrated data system for the Part C program, efforts to increase the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, and the success of strategic planning in regions like the Northwest. Also highlighted was ongoing work in community colleges to embed disability content into early childhood programs and the growth of a Public Health Certificate Program.

Budget Cuts Impact Vulnerable Services

The group discussed concerns about budget cuts impacting services for vulnerable populations, particularly in healthcare and food security. Walt highlighted the potential threat to Medicaid spending, noting that optional waivers supporting community care could be cut, and outlined plans to map healthcare policymaking in Connecticut to better influence decisions. The discussion emphasized the need for the council to be more proactive in monitoring and influencing state budget decisions to protect services for people with high needs.

Connecticut Disability Budget Cuts Impact

The group discussed concerns about recent state budget cuts disproportionately affecting people with disabilities and universities in Connecticut. Walt explained that Medicaid cuts would primarily impact the Husky D population, while Molly highlighted the growing wait times for assistance and understaffing at help centers. Mary Beth raised concerns about the lack of information available to families about programs for children with disabilities, noting that Part C programs now have waiting lists and that current service delivery models may be too expensive. The discussion concluded with a call for rethinking service models and staffing approaches to make them more affordable and effective.

Addressing Disability Program Funding Challenges

The group discussed concerns about federal funding cuts and changes to disability programs, with Linda Barry sharing that the ACGME has removed diversity and disability programming. Mary Beth highlighted the need to diversify healthcare providers, particularly in special education, while Walt suggested focusing on regional and state-level funding sources rather than pursuing federal grants. The group agreed to explore alternative funding strategies and systemic

changes within the state, with Walt proposing to examine inefficient spending areas like Southbury Training School to reallocate resources.

Healthcare Funding Advocacy Strategies

The group discussed challenges in healthcare funding and advocacy, particularly in the New England region. Linda suggested that each state could become its own healthcare laboratory and proposed partnering with non-disability organizations to secure more funding. Mary Beth highlighted the difficulty in securing foundation grants, noting that many organizations are competing for limited funds. Walt suggested using Council funding to leverage additional foundation grants and recommended leveraging existing educational resources like Ellen Andrews' website to inform the public about healthcare funding. The group agreed on the importance of educating stakeholders about Medicaid and its role in funding disability services.

Policy Communication and Advocacy Strategies

The group discussed strategies for communicating complex policy issues to the public, particularly around funding and service impacts. They agreed to focus on simplifying messages and targeting information to specific service recipients, with Molly suggesting short video explanations similar to Tom Fiorentino's previous work. Walt shared challenges in explaining funding sources to parent groups, highlighting the need for transparency about state funding dependence. The group discussed the importance of voting and accessibility, with Molly mentioning their RevUp coalition's work on polling place accessibility. They concluded by agreeing to identify three key priority areas for advocacy, with Mary Beth planning to consult with her DD Network partners.

Next steps:

- Mary Beth, Molly, Walt, and Toby to meet this month to discuss what the DD Network can do collectively given the current funding situation.
- Mary Beth, Molly, Walt, and Toby to identify three top priority areas to focus on across their network.
- Mary Beth to explore information dissemination strategies to educate the public about critical issues affecting disability services and Medicaid funding.
- Walt to continue efforts to convene leaders of statewide advocacy organizations to align on legislative priorities.
- Walt to find funding for a consultant to create a power map of healthcare policymaking in Connecticut.
- Molly to continue work with the RevUp coalition on voting accessibility and education.
- Mary Beth to continue the Center for Equity work despite funding cuts by reallocating resources.

Next Meeting:

The next CAC meeting will be scheduled in December.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Jozef
Administrative Officer
Connecticut UCEDD