



**New Hampshire Brain & Spinal
Cord Injury Advisory Council
Concord, New Hampshire**



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Advisory Council (The "Advisory Council") is charged by the New Hampshire Legislature with investigating the unmet needs of New Hampshire residents with brain or spinal cord injuries. See NHRSA 137-K. The Advisory Council has been holding public hearings for twenty-seven years, since its establishment by statute in 1997.

Senate Bill 439, AN ACT relative to the advisory council and community based programs was signed into law on July 19, 2022. This law streamlines the council membership from fifteen to eight members, removes the barriers, makes the council more productive and ensures quorums. By having a smaller required number of members, the dedicated members who attend meetings regularly meet or exceed the quorum count for voting on activities.

This year, two hearings were held to solicit input from the public; one in Conway, NH on June 3, 2024 and one in Nashua at St. Joseph's Hospital on October 2, 2024. We also received telephone and written input from several parties including agencies that provide services.

FINDINGS

Results from the testimony at the public hearings indicate that serious unmet needs continue to prevail in New Hampshire. Unfortunately, most feedback from the public regarding unmet needs has remained largely unchanged for well over twenty-seven years.

Comments from the public followed several categories:

In general, it was felt that there is a lack of medical and general public education and awareness for persons living with brain and spinal cord injuries. This took a variety of forms.

- **Lack of Medical and General Public Education and Awareness**

- Here is testimony of Granite State Independent Living, a leading provider of services to such persons in NH: *There is often widespread misunderstanding by employers (and some primary care health professionals) regarding issues around brain and spinal cord injuries, particularly when the individual has no obvious visible disability. Access to resources is made more complicated because many people do not understand how these injuries affect survivors, families and caregivers.*
- Testimony from St. Joseph's Hospital in Nashua clearly articulated the challenges posed by the managed-care companies, which results in a considerable amount of wasted professional time, circuitous run arounds, nonresponsiveness and a general unwillingness to approve needed rehabilitation.
- There is a need for more home support for individuals with disabilities and family members. From the Lakes Region Community Services. we received the following statement:
 - *Direct care workers, who play an essential role in supporting these individuals, are currently compensated at an average wage of \$17 per hour. This wage is insufficient to meet the basic cost of living in our state, making it imperative to advocate for a living wage for these dedicated professionals.*

- Difficulties finding and retaining support staff were reported from all parts of the state
- There is a need for consistent case management, which often does not exist.
- Both brain injury and spinal cord injury survivors are prone to losing employment and face a lack of supports needed to return to work, misunderstandings about their abilities and deficits, and difficulty finding employers open to supporting them with their disabilities. This then leads to financial issues and family breakdowns.
- There is a significant lack of public transportation, especially accessible transportation.
- There is a lack of both affordable and accessible housing. This has been well documented throughout the state, but is especially difficult for survivors of brain and spinal cord injuries.
- On a positive note, a new community program / brain injury clubhouse has opened in Manchester.
- There is a significant lack of behavioral health supports for survivors and family members. Especially lacking are mental health professionals who understand brain and spinal cord injuries.

Regrettably, there is a substantial lack of services and supports for brain and spinal cord injury survivors and the issues with staffing seem to have made things worse. Imagine if you were a significantly disabled person needs help getting up in the morning and getting dressed and you have no staff person. You can easily wind up spending the day in bed whether you like it or not.

The Numbers

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides comprehensive data on traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) across the United States, including New Hampshire.

According to the CDC, TBIs are a significant public health issue, leading to numerous emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths each year. In New Hampshire, the CDC reports that there are approximately 1,500 hospitalizations and 200 deaths annually due to TBI. These injuries can result from various causes, including falls, motor vehicle accidents, and sports-related incidents. Brain injury surveillance data shows that there are approximately 13,000-15,000/per year emergency room concussion/mild TBI visits based on New Hampshire discharge data from the NH Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However this number is a significant undercount because many people will avoid going to the ER after a concussion.

Attached find a detailed breakdown of the number of brain injuries and strokes by County for review.

We greatly encourage the state of New Hampshire to review these issues and we look forward to working with you on resolutions.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue.

If you have any questions about this report, feel free to contact Advisory Council Administrator Ellen Edgerly at Ellenedge@comcast.net or 603-834-9570. Prior reports are available on the New Hampshire Brain Injury Website at <http://www.bianh.org/bsciac.html>

Respectfully submitted,

John Richards

DATE: **December 2, 2024**

John Richards, MSW, LICSW, Chairperson
Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Advisory Council

ADDENDUM TOP BRAIN INJURY PRIORITY/NEED:

There is a critical need for a new brain injury needs assessment and state brain injury plan since the last comprehensive needs assessment and plan was completed by BDS in 1999 -25 years ago! In the meantime, recent needs assessments and state plans have been completed for other populations, for example, such as the state plan on aging and the ten-year mental health state plan.

Conduct a comprehensive statewide brain injury needs assessment of persons living with brain injury, family/caregivers, professionals and provider organizations. The needs assessment will be conducted in partnership with key stakeholder organizations such as the NH Brain & Spinal Cord Injury Advisory Council, Granite State Independent Living, Disability Rights Center, CSNI and the Area Agency system. Conducting a combination of in-depth interviews, surveys and focus groups. The needs assessment should explore brain injury services and unmet needs, training and resource needs of providers, caregiver needs and the intersection of brain injury and behavioral health.

Key brain injury stakeholder organization, NH BDS, the Area Agency system, the NH Brain & Spinal Cord Injury Advisory Council, BIANH and other key stakeholders, will develop a state plan that will serve as a strategic plan for brain injury efforts in the state. The state plan will be a living document and help guide the state in determining how best to improve services and supports for all people living with brain injury in the state. It will include goals for closing the gap of unmet or insufficiently met needs of children, youth, adults and older persons with brain injury and their families.

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