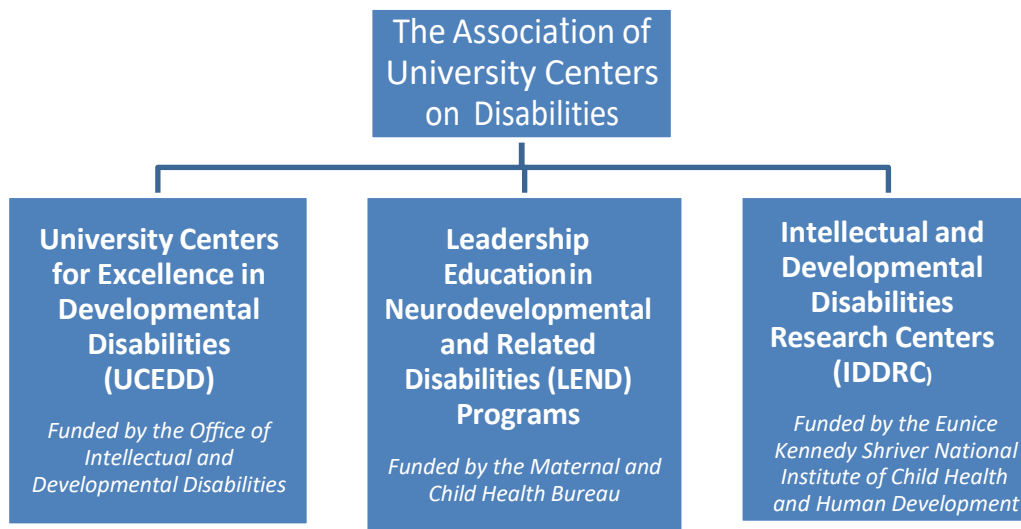


About AUCD

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is a membership organization that supports and promotes a network of university-based interdisciplinary programs located in every state and territory. AUCD's mission is to advance policies and practices that improve the health, education, social, and economic well-being of all people with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and their communities by supporting our members in research, education, health, and service activities that achieve our vision.

AUCD includes three different types of Network members: University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Programs, and Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers (IDDRC). AUCD's members are located in every state and territory and include 67 UCEDDs, 60 LENDs, and 16 IDDRCs.



Flow chart of AUCD with its three types of programs: UCEDDs, LENDs, and IDDRCs, including the funding source for each type of program.

AUCD has [created a series of “How-To” and Other Background Policy Materials.](#) These materials are linked throughout this Toolkit.

About Congress

Congress is made up of two chambers, or groups: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Both chambers are responsible for writing and passing federal, or national, laws, including laws that decide the federal government's budget and funding for programs each year. A bill, which is an idea that may become law, must pass both chambers and be signed by the President before it can become a law.

The current Congress is called the 118th Congress because it is the 118th group of elected Members of Congress meeting together to make laws. It began on January 3, 2023, and will end on January 3, 2025. While each Congress meets for two years, they take breaks, called 'recesses', throughout that time. [During a recess](#), Representatives and Senators are not in Washington, D.C., do not vote on bills, and are instead working in their district, state or territory.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two chambers that are part of Congress. Each of the 435 members represents a set number of people who live in a Congressional district, or part of a state. States have different numbers of Representatives based on their population. For example, Montana has a smaller population, so there is one Representative for the whole state; in comparison, New York has a larger population, so there are 27 Representatives.

Representatives are elected for two years at a time. Legislation introduced in the House of Representatives begins with H.R. for 'House of Representatives' followed by a number to identify each bill. You have one member of the House (Representative) who represents you. [Find your Representative](#).

Senate

The Senate is the other chamber that is part of Congress. Every state, no matter their size or population, has two Senators for a total of 100 Senators. Each Senator is elected for six years at a time. In addition to writing and passing federal bills, the Senate has the job of approving Presidential nominees for positions in the Executive and Judicial branches. Legislation introduced in the Senate begins with S. for 'Senate' followed by a number to identify each bill. You have two Senators who represent you. [Find your Senators](#).

Congress.gov

[Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) is the official legislative website for the United States to use find information about Representatives or Senators and up-to-date information on legislative actions.



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Follow the Actions and Votes of your Members of Congress

You can view the legislative actions of your Representative and Senators by going to their [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) profile. Type their last name into the search box at the top of the home page and select “Members” from the dropdown box to the left of the search box. Press enter and click on the name. The page will include information on the legislation that the Representative or Senator has sponsored or cosponsored. It will also include their votes.

Follow Legislation of Interest to You

You can follow specific pieces of legislation that interest you on [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) by typing the name or bill number of the legislation into the search box at the top of the home page (e.g. H.R. 34 or S. 567). Press enter and click on the name of the legislation to find information, such as a summary, text, actions taken, amendments, sponsors and cosponsors. Bills that have been passed by the House and the Senate and signed by the President to become law begin with P.L. for ‘Public Law’.

Meeting with Members of Congress

Meeting with Members of Congress and their staff helps to educate offices about the important needs of the disability community. Meetings and follow-up communications provide the opportunity to share concerns and establish the UCEDD/LEND/IDDRC as a resource for the office.

Requesting and Scheduling a Meeting

Contacting Congress


We recommend you contact your Member of Congress’ offices as soon as possible to set-up meetings. The best way to schedule a meeting is via email or phone call. This [sample script](#) can be individualized to set-up a meeting.

You can call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Ask to speak to the office of the Senator or Representative and then ask to speak to the staff that covers health or disability issues. These staff are the best people to educate about UCEDDs/LENDs/IDDRCs. If you want to discuss employment or education issues, ask for the staffers that cover those issues. It is not uncommon to need to get to know and build relationships with multiple staff in the same office because they cover different issues.

Or, send an email requesting a meeting to the:

- general office email for the Member of Congress;
- office staff scheduler; or
- office staffer(s) who work on issues you want to discuss.

You can find the general office email and sometimes the office scheduler’s email on the Member’s website. You can also reach out to Kevin Ryle at kryle@aucd.org and he can share contact information. Typical email addresses for office staff in the House of



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Representatives are firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov and for office staff in the Senate are firstname_lastname@lastnameofsenator.senate.gov.

If you come from a large state or only have time for a few meetings, and need help prioritizing who to meet with while in D.C., focus on meeting with the Member's who serve on committees that oversee the creation and funding of AUCD's and most disability programs, these include:

In the Senate, the [Labor, Health, Human Services, Education and Related Agencies subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee](#), the [Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee](#) and the [Finance Committee](#).

In the House of Representatives, the [Labor, Health, Human Services, Education and Related Agencies subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee](#), [Energy and Commerce Committee](#) and [Education and Workforce Committee](#).

If you are requesting a meeting in email. The email should include:

- Your name and contact information;
- Center name and names of other participants in the meeting (keep this small for in-person meetings);
- Your availability to meet (dates and times);
- Your reason(s) for requesting the meeting; and
- Thank them for their time.

Once you schedule a meeting, please share your meetings with AUCD. [A survey](#) has been created to collect this information prior to and at the conference.

You may not receive an immediate response to your request. Congressional staffers are busy, and it is normal to need to follow-up on your emails and calls. If you do not receive a response after a few business days, you can make a follow-up call or send a follow-up email.

Preparing for a Meeting

AUCD supports policies that improve the lives of persons with disabilities across the lifespan. Policy issues that impact people with disabilities and their families include, but are not limited to, civil rights, education, employment, and healthcare. AUCD has several tools and resources you can use to learn about and stay up-to-date on issues impacting persons with disabilities:

[Disability Policy News](#)

AUCD Disability Policy News is sent out every other Monday and includes public policy updates that affect the disability community. [Subscribe](#).



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[Tuesdays with Liz](#)

Tuesdays with Liz is a video series highlighting current issues in disability policy. It is hosted by Liz Weintraub, a long-time disability advocate and AUCD Senior Advocacy Specialist, and produced by AUCD.

[AUCD's Public Policy Priorities.](#)

AUCD's current priorities in Congress during conference include funding for AUCD's programs and other disability programs and the reauthorization of the [Autism CAREs Act](#). AUCD recommends that you prioritize discussing these issues at your meeting(s). [Learn more about policy terms in plain language.](#)

Budget and Appropriations

The new federal Fiscal Year (FY) started on October 1st. On September 30th, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) (continuing funding at the same levels as last year) for FY 2024. The CR will expire on November 17th. Congress has to decide how to fund programs for the rest of the FY. For the most up-to-date information on Budget and Appropriations, [subscribe](#) to [Disability Policy News](#). It is important that every office knows what the UCEDDs/LENDs/IDDRCs are and the impact the programs have in their state and territory and what the impact of cuts to these and other disability programs would be in their state or territory.

Autism CAREs Act

The [Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support \(CARES\) Act](#) is a federal law that provides funding for research, training, and service for people with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities. The CAREs Act creates the LEND programs. The CAREs Act must be reauthorized every 5 years. The Act was last passed in 2019. It will "sunset" or expire on September 30, 2024.

AUCD has been working with partners in the disability community to reauthorize the CAREs Act. AUCD will have a new brief about the CAREs Act and our recommendations to improve it available before the conference that can be shared with offices. It is important that every office knows what the CAREs Act is and how it improves the lives of people with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities in their state or territory.

Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act ([S. 533](#) / [H.R. 1263](#))

This bill will phase out the use of 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act (5 years after it is signed into law) which currently allows paying people with disabilities subminimum wage. The bill will also assist employers providing employment under 14(c) in transforming their business models to support individuals with disabilities through competitive integrated employment.

Original Sponsors and Co-sponsors: In the Senate, Senator Casey (D-PA) and Senator Daines (R-MT), and in the House of Representatives by Representative Scott (D-VA-3) and Representative McMorris Rogers (R-WA-5). All House cosponsors can be found [here](#).

*This document was prepared by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities.
For more information, visit www.aucd.org or email policy@aucd.org.*



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Liz Weintraub interviewed Senator Daines about the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act on her YouTube Channel: Tuesday's with Liz. [You can click here to watch the interview!](#) More information can be found on the [Senate Aging Committee website](#). [AUCD has also created this explainer.](#)

Home and Community Based Services

There are a number of bills that have been introduced this session of Congress that look to improve the structure and financing of home and community-based services (HCBS) in the Medicaid program. It is critical that we educate Members of Congress on the impact of Medicaid's HCBS program and alleviating the workforce crisis. [Learn more about Medicaid and HCBS.](#)

Learn About Members of Congress

In addition to learning about policy issues, AUCD recommends that you learn about the Members of Congress. For many Senators and Representatives, some issues are more important to them than others based on the needs of their state or territory, personal beliefs, or committee assignments. Learning which issues are important to your Member of Congress will help you tailor your conversation to what is important to the Member and is most likely to support. [Learn more about how to get to know your Members of Congress.](#) ([plain language version](#))

Advising Policymakers versus Advocacy or Lobbying

The UCEDDs/LENDs/IDDRCs should be engaged in advising and educating Members of Congress, their staff and other federal government officials. Employees or trainees of a federally-funded programs can engage in advising and educating Members of Congress, their staff, or other federal officials by:

- Educating offices on the impact of current or proposed policies and laws;
- Sharing research, publications, and policy analysis; and/or
- Responding to information requests from policymakers.

When representing your UCEDD/LEND/IDDRC and/or while traveling on federal funds, you cannot meet with Members of Congress, their staff or other federal government officials and use the opportunity to lobby that a specific law be passed or defeated, support a specific political candidate or party, or engage in civil disobedience. Learn more in the [Education versus Lobbying Factsheet](#).

How to Start a Meeting

Most meetings are with staff. Staff are very knowledgeable about the issues and policy positions of their boss and will bring the information and stories provided in the meeting to the Member of Congress. AUCD recommends the following steps in meetings.



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Describe the UCEDDs/LENDs/IDDRCs

The Member of Congress or staff may not know about AUCD or the UCEDD/LEND/IDDRC. Begin meetings by describing generally the UCEDDs/LENDs/IDDRCs, the programs in the state or territory, key projects in the UCEDD/LEND/IDDRC that are in process or just completed, and the outcomes achieved.

Educate and Advise the Members of Congress

Educate and advise the Member of Congress or staff by expanding upon the 2-3 topics highlighted in the meeting request. This is the opportunity to discuss the barriers faced by the disability community in the state or territory, and the important work the UCEDD/LEND/IDDRC is doing to address these barriers. This is also a time to educate members about the need for legislation or increased funding to address these barriers. As a refresher, remember you cannot lobby in meetings. [Education versus Lobbying Factsheet](#).

Share Your Stories

If comfortable, share personal stories. Stories help to connect policies to people in the community and help Members of Congress and their staff to better understand the real-world impact of policies in their own state or territory. [Read a sample format for sharing your story](#).

[Guide to Meeting With Your Members of Congress \(plain language version\)](#) and [Make the Most Out of Your Visit](#).

Other Tips for Meetings

- If several members of the UCEDD/LEND/IDDRC are attending the meeting, plan in advance who will say what during the meeting. This will reduce confusion and make the most of the limited time.
- If there are multiple UCEDDs/LENDs/IDDRCs in the state or in the district, try to coordinate having one meeting to make the best use of a Member of Congress' or staff's time.
- In advance, confirm the location of the meeting.
- If in-person, allow enough time to walk between Capitol Office Buildings and if needed, go through security. It is best to schedule meetings on the House side together and then the Senate side together. You have to exit one side, walk across the Capitol and re-enter the other side through security. Allow at least 45 minutes between meetings. Meetings frequently run late.



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- If the meeting is virtual and will take place via video platform or conference call, make sure every attendee has the meeting ID number and password. Start the meeting a few minutes early to be sure everyone can join and there are no technical issues. You may need to provide a link for web conferencing or a call-in number for a conference call.
- Everyone in attendance should introduce themselves with their name, position, and relationship to AUCD. Try to limit introductions to 2-3 minutes.
- When referencing the Member of Congress in conversation, use 'Senator/Representative' and their last name. For example, 'Senator Duckworth' or 'Representative Smith'.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, it is okay to say, "I don't know, but I will get back to you with an answer." And, then do some research and follow-up with the office.
- The staffer may refer to the Member of Congress as 'my boss'.
- Thank the staff member for taking the meeting at the end of the meeting and ask for the business card(s) of the staff at the meeting.

After the Meeting

- After the meeting, send a 'thank you' email to the staff with whom you met, ideally on the same day or the next day. In addition to thanking the staff, attach materials, and expand upon the topics you discussed. The follow-up email is an equally important part of the policy process!

[Follow-up with AUCD](#)

Please share the following information with AUCD's Policy Team after your meeting(s) [by using this survey](#):

- Office(s) met with and names of staff members that were present in the meeting; and
- Brief list of what you discussed, and any follow-up needed from the AUCD Policy Team.

AUCD Policy and Policy Innovation Teams

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*This document was prepared by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities.
For more information, visit www.aucd.org or email policy@aucd.org.*