

**AUCD Public Policy Priorities
First Session of 114th Congress**

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) works to ensure that all people with disabilities have access to all aspects of society, including excellent education, health care, career paths, community resources, and economic opportunities. In addition, we work to promote equity to address disparities in access, outcomes, and quality. During the 113th Congress, large bipartisan majorities voted to reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and pass the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. These two critical new laws support the idea that every young person with a significant disability should be prepared for success in the competitive labor market and should be able to get the long-term services and supports they need. AUCD applauds these developments and looks forward to working on a bipartisan basis with the new Congress to build on this progress as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 40th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Employment

In January of 2015, 4.76 million of the over 15 million working age people with disabilities participated in the labor force.¹ That means that despite evidence that most people with disabilities want to work, only 31% were working or looking for work, compared to 76% of people without disabilities.² Of those who are working, people with disabilities earn up to \$21,000 less on average than those with similar educational achievement.³ These employment disparities cause hardship and harm to millions of American families. Our national employment goals should include working toward equitable participation in the workforce by people with disabilities with a short-term objective of six million people with disabilities in the workforce by the end of 2015. AUCD will work with Congress, the administration, states, and local governments to improve all public policies that promote competitive integrated employment for people with developmental and other disabilities. Toward this goal, AUCD members are working within their states to help implement WIOA. AUCD will also work with Congress to address other barriers to employment such as ongoing work disincentives built into our income support and healthcare programs, inadequate transportation, barriers to participation in higher education and career and technical education, and discrimination.

Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) in the Community

Long-term services and supports enable millions of people with disabilities and seniors to live and participate in their communities and to be active, contributing citizens. Many people with disabilities receive their LTSS through the Medicaid program. However, over one million people with other disabilities are on waiting lists, limiting their ability to work and participate in their communities. AUCD urges Congress to address this long-term financing shortfall by creating a public LTSS social insurance program based on functional need. Supporting the functional needs of American citizen will increase their ability live independently, work, and continue contributing to society.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted. (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t06.htm>)

² Gould, P. nTIDE Jobs Report: New Year Shines Bright for People with Disabilities Finding Employment. Feb 6, 2015. (<http://www.researchondisability.org/news-features/2015/02/06/ntide-jobs-report-new-year-shines-bright-for-people-with-disabilities-finding-employment>)

³ Those with Disabilities Earn 37% Less on Average; Gap is Even Wider in Some States. American Institutes for Research. December 14, 2014. (<http://www.air.org/news/press-release/those-disabilities-earn-37-less-average-gap-even-wider-some-states>)

The vast majority – over 80 percent – of people with disabilities and seniors prefer to live in their homes and communities.⁴ AUCD strongly supports the Medicaid home and community-based services program and urges Congress and the administration to support efforts to improve it, including regulatory and legislative efforts to reverse the Medicaid institutional bias, regulate and improve the community integration of service settings, ensure the preparation and development of a strong direct support workforce, and increase the stock of affordable and accessible housing, including requiring all housing developed with federal funds to be visitable.

Finally, AUCD urges Congress and states to support families with members with a disability, including parents with disabilities. While many people with disabilities receive Medicaid services and other governmental supports, the vast majority of people with disabilities are supported by family members and friends. Unpaid family caregivers provide an essential national service and AUCD urges Congress and the administration to support them by expanding the Lifespan Respite Care Act Program, National Family Caregiver Support Program, and other family support activities funded by the Administration for Community Living.

Health Care

People with disabilities experience health disparities in both access to care and outcomes, with high proportions reporting fair or poor health, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cost as a barrier to receiving health care.⁵ They often have significant health costs and specialized needs. AUCD strongly supports access to health insurance through Medicare, Medicaid, and the Health Insurance Marketplaces and believes that each could be strengthened to better serve people with disabilities. In Medicare and Medicaid, people with disabilities need access to specialty providers and services particularly for adults with disabilities as they age. In the Marketplaces, people with disabilities and their families need accurate information, strong provider networks, and full coverage of essential health benefits. AUCD urges Congress and the administration to protect and improve these programs, particularly in access to health coverage and care.

As many as one in six children through the age of five are at risk for a developmental delay or disability.⁶ Early identification allows communities to intervene earlier, leading to more effective interventions during the preschool years and putting children on a trajectory of success. AUCD urges Congress to provide significant investments into federal programs that provide the early screening and early intervention services, including protecting Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment benefit, reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program, and expanding support for Part C Infant and Family section of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Social Security

The non-retirement components of Social Security were created almost fifty years ago to address the needs of people with disabilities and their families. These programs were developed at a time when it was thought that individuals with disabilities could not work nor live independently. It is time to modernize the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) programs. During this Congress, when financing for the SSDI trust fund must be addressed, AUCD urges Congress to both address the solvency issue and fund States to test new models of providing long-term services and supports including income supports to people with disabilities that do not discourage those individuals who want to work and save money.

AUCD urges Congress to address aspects of the SSI and SSDI programs that inhibit financial stability and access to the middle class for people with disabilities, including asset limits for Supplemental Security Income recipients, the substantial gainful activity caps for Social Security Disability Insurance beneficiaries, and the

⁴ Bayer, A, Harper, L. Fixing to Stay: A National Survey of Housing and Home Modification Issues: May 2000. p. 4. (http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/home_mod.pdf)

⁵ Drum C., McClain M., Horner-Johnson W., Taitano G. Health Disparities Chart Book on Disability. Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire: 2011. (http://www.iod.unh.edu/pdf/Health%20Disparities%20Chart%20Book_080411.pdf)

⁶ Boyle CA, Boulet S, Schieve L, Cohen RA, Blumberg SJ, Yeargin-Allsopp M, Visser S, Kogan MD. Trends in the Prevalence of Developmental Disabilities in US Children, 1997–2008. *Pediatrics*. 2011; 27: 1034-1042. (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/facts.html>)

definition of disability that forces individuals with disabilities to prove that they cannot work. The \$2,000 asset limit for SSI has not been raised since 1989.⁷ AUCD suggests that Congress raise this limit to \$5,000 for individuals, then index it to wage growth. Congress should eliminate marriage penalties in SSI by maintaining this individual asset limit regardless of marital status. AUCD also suggests that Congress raise the substantial gainful activity limit in the SSDI program to at least \$2,000 a month for all types of disabilities, including blindness, and continue the annual adjustment according to wage growth.

Education

Educational attainment is directly linked to better employment outcomes, higher wages, and lower unemployment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2013 someone without a high school diploma earned 27% less than a person with a diploma, and 57% less than a person with a bachelor's degree⁸. In the 2010-2011 school-year, only 22 states graduated over 60% of their students with disabilities with a regular diploma⁹. AUCD is working to make high school graduation a reality for all students with disabilities and has set a short-term goal of adding at least six more states to that list by the end of 2015.

To reach this goal, AUCD urges the 114th Congress to reauthorize and improve the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Future education policy must retain the accountability mechanisms of No Child Left Behind for students with disabilities, which made it possible for families, community members, teachers, and school leaders to track their achievement for the first time. Students with disabilities should be included in the general curriculum and in general education services, and Congress must limit the use of alternate assessments so students with disabilities can graduate with the skills, knowledge, and abilities linked to a regular high school diploma.

Higher education levels lead to economic independence. AUCD supports proposals to increase access to post-secondary education opportunities within the Higher Education Act and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. We urge a robust reauthorization of the Higher Education Act with provisions supporting access to higher education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Finally, students cannot learn in environments where they feel unsafe. AUCD supports legislation that provides schools and educators with the tools to use positive behavior interventions and supports, eliminate the use of seclusion and restraints, end bullying, and create positive learning environments.

About AUCD

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is a membership organization that supports and promotes a national network of university-based interdisciplinary programs. Network members consist of:

- 67 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) receiving core funding from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD)
- 43 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Programs receiving core funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB)
- 15 Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers (IDDRC) receiving core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

AUCD members work with state and local partners to design innovative, efficient programs and policies to achieve the outcomes all Americans want: dignity, meaningful choice, and the opportunity to contribute and

⁷ U.S. Social Security Administration Office of Retirement and Disability Policy. Annual Statistical Supplement, 2012. Supplemental Security Income Program Description and Legislative History. (<http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2012/ssi.html>)

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employment Projections. March 2014. (http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)

⁹ GOVERNING. High School Graduation Rates by State. (<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state.html>)

succeed. In every US state and territory, our centers serve as a bridge between the university and the community to ensure full participation, independent living, and economic opportunity for all people with disabilities. AUCD looks forward to partnering with 114th Congress, the administration, states, and local governments to achieve these outcomes.