2025 AUCD Annual Report

National Network Connections

About AUCD

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is a national organization that supports a network of Centers and Programs working to improve the lives of people with disabilities. AUCD's Network's mission is to promote inclusion, health, and quality of life for individuals with developmental and other disabilities and their families.

The AUCD Network includes:

- **68 UCEDDs** (University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities) that are focused on systems change to support full community participation and independence for people with disabilities.

- **60 LEND** Programs (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities) focused on training future leaders to improve health outcomes for people with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities through person- and family-centered care.

- **15 IDDRCs** (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers) that conducted research to better understand and treat intellectual and developmental disabilities through integrated scientific approaches.

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Letter from Leadership

2025 AUCD Annual Report: National Network Connections

The strength of the AUCD Network lies not only in its breadth but in its unity of purpose. Across **68 UCEDDs**, **60 LEND** programs, and **15 IDDRCs**, our members share a deep commitment to advancing inclusion, equity, and opportunity for people with disabilities.

Together, we form a powerful national, and increasingly global, network of educators, researchers, clinicians, advocates, and leaders dedicated to improving quality of life for individuals and families in every community.

This past year demonstrated, once again, how collaboration across the AUCD Network drives real-world change. Through our collective work, the network impacted **over 2.4 million** people in the disability community, from providing continuing education to technical assistance to clinical services and so much more. **Over 5,000** people were trained across **46 disciplines** such as dietetics, speech pathology, nursing and more.

We are seeing great work across the country from our UCEDDs, LEND programs, and IDDRCs.

In **South Dakota**, the UCEDD and LEND programs are bridging systems of care—linking healthcare, education, and behavioral health services to strengthen rural and tribal communities.

In **Minnesota**, the **Institute on Community Integration** continues to elevate the essential work of Direct Support Professionals through Frontline Initiative, a publication that amplifies the voices of DSPs and self-advocates nationwide. Its new Direct Support Workforce Update has become a vital resource for strengthening teams, mentoring new professionals, and improving the everyday supports that make community inclusion possible.

Meanwhile, the **Kennedy Krieger Institute** in **Maryland** is redefining innovation in diagnostics. Researchers there developed a groundbreaking one-minute video game that can accurately identify autism with **80% success**. This is a great example of how AUCD's research network is expanding access to early, affordable, and precise diagnosis around the world.

In **Tennessee**, the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's TRIAD Global Collaborative** is extending the reach of the network internationally—training educators, clinicians, and caregivers across regions from the Caribbean to Vietnam to build sustainable, culturally responsive autism services.

These examples reflect the essence of AUCD's mission: connecting knowledge, leadership, and compassion across programs and borders to achieve impact no single institution could accomplish alone.

Every day, our members are not only serving their communities; they are shaping the future of inclusion through shared expertise, innovation, and a common purpose.

Together, we are more than a network. We are a movement advancing access, opportunity, and equity for all.

Sandra Root-Elledge
Interim Executive Director

Impact of Our Network

In the last year, the AUCD Network has had a lasting impact on the disability community across the country. Through UCEDDs, LEND programs, and IDDRCs, the Network had a profound impact on the trainings, outreach, and research on autism and intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Bridging Systems, Building Solutions: South Dakota UCEDD & LEND Drive Change in Underserved Communities

In South Dakota, the Center for Disabilities, home to both the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program, is redefining what it means to lead systems-change work for people with disabilities.

In a recent episode of the [UMKC IHD Accessible Podcast: Voices of the Network](#), Dr. Eric Kurtz, Executive Director of the South Dakota UCEDD, discussed how the Center is addressing some of the state's most pressing challenges, especially in rural, tribal, and underserved communities.

Working in the Gaps

Kurtz describes the Center's mission as "working in the gaps"—bridging the space between healthcare, education, behavioral health, and community services. In a state where geography, workforce shortages, and limited infrastructure often isolate services, this approach is essential.

"We're not tied to one system," Kurtz explains. "That gives us a unique ability to bring people together, find what's missing, and help communities solve problems that no single agency can fix on its own."

This strategy has led to coordinated efforts in pediatric mental health care, services for individuals with developmental disabilities, and rural workforce development.

> **"We're not tied to one system. That gives us a unique ability to bring people together, find what's missing, and help communities solve problems that no single agency can fix on its own."** - Dr. Eric Kurtz

A Deep Commitment to Mental Health

Mental health has been a longstanding concern across South Dakota, particularly for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through initiatives like the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) Program, the Center partners with clinics, hospitals, and state agencies to train providers in rural areas—ensuring individuals receive timely, appropriate care close to home.

Grounded Partnerships with Tribal Nations

South Dakota is home to nine federally recognized tribes, and the Center is committed to building lasting relationships grounded in mutual trust and respect. That includes recruiting and mentoring LEND trainees from tribal communities, many of whom return as leaders and providers in their home regions.

The Strength of the Network

Kurtz emphasized the value of the AUCD Network in accelerating progress: "We don't have to reinvent the wheel. We learn from each other and move faster, together."

To better share its impact, the Center publishes *Possibilities*, an annual magazine featuring real stories from individuals, families, and professionals whose lives have been changed by its programs.

"These stories remind us why we do this work," Kurtz said. "They help others see the difference collaboration makes."

MINNESOTA

The Power of Teams in Direct Support

Frontline Initiative

Effective Relationships with Teams

Frontline Initiative, a publication produced by Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota in partnership with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals, focuses on strategies for team building, mentoring, conflict resolution, and sustaining professional relationships.

In the last year, the publication launched Direct Support Workforce Update, a new addition to Frontline Initiative. It offers a comprehensive update on the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce, highlighting systemic challenges, innovative solutions, and the vital importance of teamwork between DSPs and the people they support.

The edition opened with an overview of critical issues affecting the DSP field and provides resources for readers to explore these topics further.

Self-advocates BJ Stasio and Katrina Simons stressed that true support requires DSPs to work collaboratively with individuals with disabilities, not just for them. Cheryl Dougan shared a personal reflection about her son, Renzo, whose quality of life has declined due to restrictive policies that now limit the flexibility of DSPs.

> "*I know how important teamwork is for the success of the people we support. But creating a strong team isn't always easy—it takes good communication, hard work, and integrity from all of us.*" - Nick Smith

Several stories emphasized how teamwork and creativity can break barriers. Sarah Sharp recounted how her team of DSPs improved services through stronger collaboration. Liz Rowntree shared how she helped the men she supports become valued neighbors, despite obstacles. Kelly Burgess and Colleen Casey describe their work with "Dream Builders," a team that offers small grants to help individuals reach personal goals alongside their DSPs.

Mentorship and organizational support also play a key role in DSP success. Giselle Lemus and Laura Schenk discussed how their mentorship programs empower new DSPs to grow confidently into their roles. Nick Smith and manager Jason Colvin highlighted how shared values foster long-term team success, while Callie Hall outlined ways she and others create meaningful volunteer opportunities with the people they support.
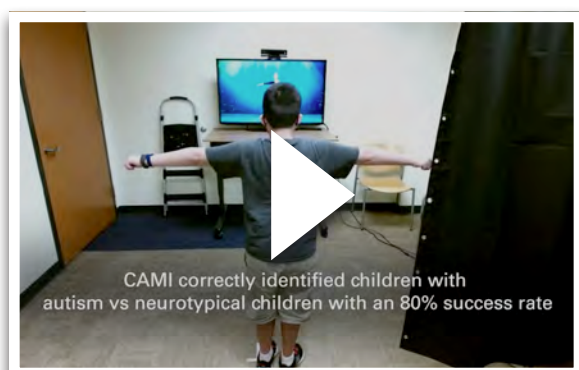
Jacquie Foss introduced a unique employee ownership model, where DSPs share operational control of their organization—boosting engagement and collaboration. Finally, DirectCourse Connect recommended training tools and badges from the E-Badge Academy to help DSPs and frontline supervisors build effective team relationships.

The publication also included a question-and-answer section that addresses concerns, provides clarifications and updates, and more for DSPs.

Frontline Initiative is the magazine published through the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education (#90RTCP0003) and the Research and Training Center on Community Living (RTC-CL) at the Institute on Community Integration (ICI), University of Minnesota, and the University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (#90DDUC0070). This issue is also supported through a cooperative agreement between the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (#03-8818-22), and the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP).

Source: The Power of Teams in Direct Support

MARYLAND

Click here to view full video.

Innovative One Minute Video Game Boasts 80 Percent Success Rate in Diagnosing Autism

A new one-minute video game is able to accurately and efficiently identify children with autism from those who have Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or are neurotypical.

Developed by researchers at the Center for Neurodevelopmental and Imaging Research at the Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI) and Nottingham Trent University, the tool is called the Computerized Assessment of Motor Imitation (CAMI). It uses motion-tracking technology to detect differences in motor imitation skills. The center focuses on neuroimaging, and its research is organized into several cores, including one for neuroimaging, which supports projects examining the role of sleep and circadian rhythm dysfunction in children with autism.

1 minute video game

80% success rate

183 children tested

In the study, 183 children, ages 7–13, were asked to copy the dance-like movements of a video avatar for one minute, while their imitation performance was measured using CAMI. The video game tool was able to correctly distinguish children with autism vs. neurotypical children with a 80% success rate. CAMI also differentiated autism from ADHD with 70% accuracy. Researchers say that this is a particular challenge because ADHD and autism often co-occur, and it can be hard to identify the diagnoses, even by expert clinicians.

Dr. Stewart Mostofsky, a pediatric neurologist and director of KKI and co-author of the study, says this tool is a step forward in how autism is diagnosed.

"Diagnosing autism can be challenging, especially when children overlap traits with other conditions like ADHD. If the condition is misdiagnosed, it can impact support and resources for the child." said Dr. Mostofsky.

Diagnosing autism requires highly trained clinicians and costs families an estimated $1,500 - $3,000 annually, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

Dr. Bahar Tunçgenç, senior author and social development expert at Nottingham Trent University, said: "Autism is traditionally seen as a social-communication disorder, but we now know sensory-motor difficulties, like motor imitation, play a key role in shaping social and communication skills. CAMI identifies autism by tapping into these challenges, which are distinct from ADHD." She added, "What makes CAMI exciting is its simplicity. Video games are fun for kids, fast for clinicians, and provide clear results."

"This tool could transform autism diagnoses worldwide. By identifying autism as precisely as possible, we can connect children to interventions that improve their quality of life and long-term outcomes."- Dr. Mostofsky

With further development, CAMI could be adapted for younger children and those with more severe developmental challenges, broadening its impact. Researchers hope CAMI's success inspires new ways to simplify and improve diagnostic tools for other conditions.

"This tool could transform autism diagnoses worldwide," said. Dr. Mostofsky. "By identifying autism as precisely as possible, we can connect children to interventions that improve their quality of life and long-term outcomes. We want to see CAMI used widely in clinics to support diagnosis as an alternative that is quick, low-cost, and requires minimal set-up."

Source: [Innovative One Minute Video Game Boasts 80 Percent Success Rate in Diagnosing Autism](#)

TENNESSEE

Bridging Global Gaps in Autism Services: TRIAD Global Collaborative Leads the Way

Access to autism services varies widely across the globe. Many communities face significant barriers such as delayed diagnoses, limited provider training, and a lack of ongoing support.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's (VKC) Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)—part of Tennessee's IDDRC, UCEDD, and LEND—has launched the **TRIAD Global Collaborative** to help close these gaps by promoting culturally responsive autism services and education programs worldwide.

The Collaborative's mission is to provide training and technical assistance to healthcare providers, educators, and caregivers in underserved regions. Through a mix of formal training programs, tele-consultations, and in-person workshops, TRIAD equips professionals with the tools they need to identify, assess, and support individuals with autism in their communities.

Training spans multiple disciplines, including pediatrics, psychology, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and special education. The trainings cover topics such as neurodiversity-affirming care, autism assessment methods, and early intervention strategies. Importantly, each training course is tailored to local cultural contexts and practical realities.

"Many of the regions we work with, like Trinidad and Tobago or Saint Lucia, face challenges similar to ours but with far fewer resources," said **Jeffrey Hine, PhD, BCBA**, assistant professor of Pediatrics

and TRIAD's director of Primary Care Outreach and Training. "Our goal isn't just to share information—it's to help build sustainable systems of support."

TRIAD's international outreach began with focused work in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean and has since expanded to include partnerships with institutions like the University of the West Indies, the Vietnam-France Psychology Institute, and Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Canada. Additional engagements have reached professionals in India, Italy, Brazil, and Vietnam.

A defining feature of the Collaborative is its commitment to ongoing engagement. "We don't want to just drop off resources and leave," said Hine. "We focus on building communities of practice—networks of trained professionals who continue the work long after we're gone."

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated TRIAD's virtual training efforts, making expertise more accessible globally. Tools like the **Tele-ASD-P**—a telehealth-based autism assessment—have helped providers expand diagnostic capacity in remote areas.

> "*We don't want to just drop off resources and leave. We focus on building communities of practice—networks of trained professionals who continue the work long after we're gone."*
> *- Jeffrey Hine, PhD, BCBA*

Looking ahead, TRIAD plans to strengthen regional online resource hubs, build peer support networks, and develop new training modules for early interventionists and caregivers. "Every community is different," Hine said. "We want our support to be practical, accessible, and built to last."

"By sharing knowledge and creating global partnerships, the TRIAD Global Collaborative is helping ensure that autism services reach those who need them—wherever they are," added **Alacia Stainbrook, PhD, BCBA-D**, TRIAD co-director.

Source: VKC TRIAD Global Collaborative Expands Access to Autism Support
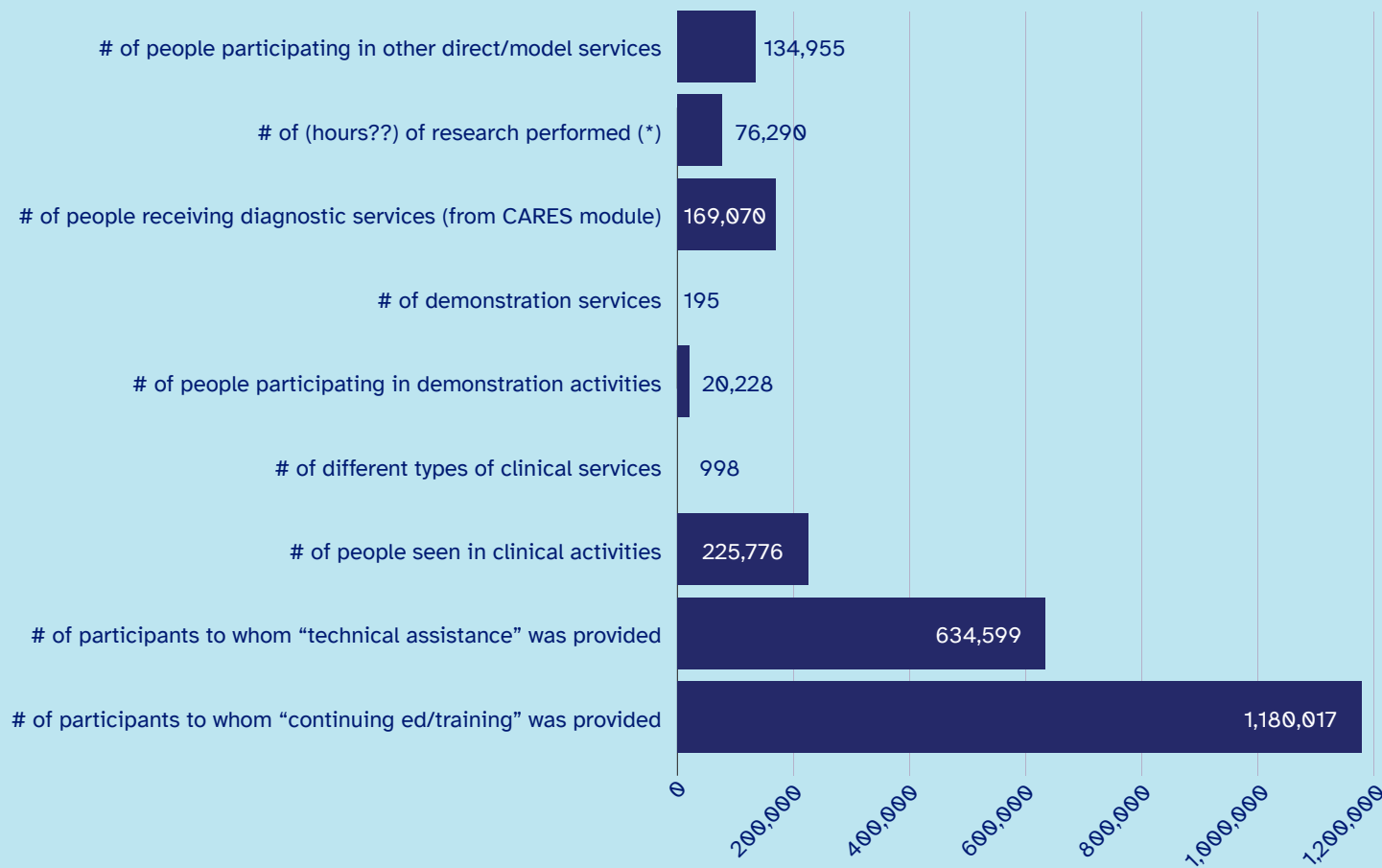
Impact By the Numbers

In FY25, the AUCD Network provided support and services to thousands across the nation.

Each day, AUCD Network members work to promote inclusion, equity, health, and respect for people with disabilities. For reporting purposes, our work is categorized into three key areas, technical assistance, continuing education, and clinical services.

1	**Technical Assistance**	Helping communities and professionals find resources and answers	**634,599** participants served
2	**Clinical Services**	Offering medical, diagnostic, and research-based support	**998** different types of services
3	**Continuing Education**	Providing high-quality professional development	**1,180,017** participants served

FY25 ACTIVITIES

Activity	Value
# of people participating in other direct/model services	134,955
# of (hours??) of research performed (*)	76,290
# of people receiving diagnostic services (from CARES module)	169,070
# of demonstration services	195
# of people participating in demonstration activities	20,228
# of different types of clinical services	998
# of people seen in clinical activities	225,776
# of participants to whom "technical assistance" was provided	634,599
# of participants to whom "continuing ed/training" was provided	1,180,017

AUCD Network Knowledge Sharing

One of AUCD's core strategic goals is to generate and disseminate knowledge. Each year, member Centers and Programs collectively produce over **10,000** expert resources, including:

5,931
Newsletters, books, book chapters and publications

4,157
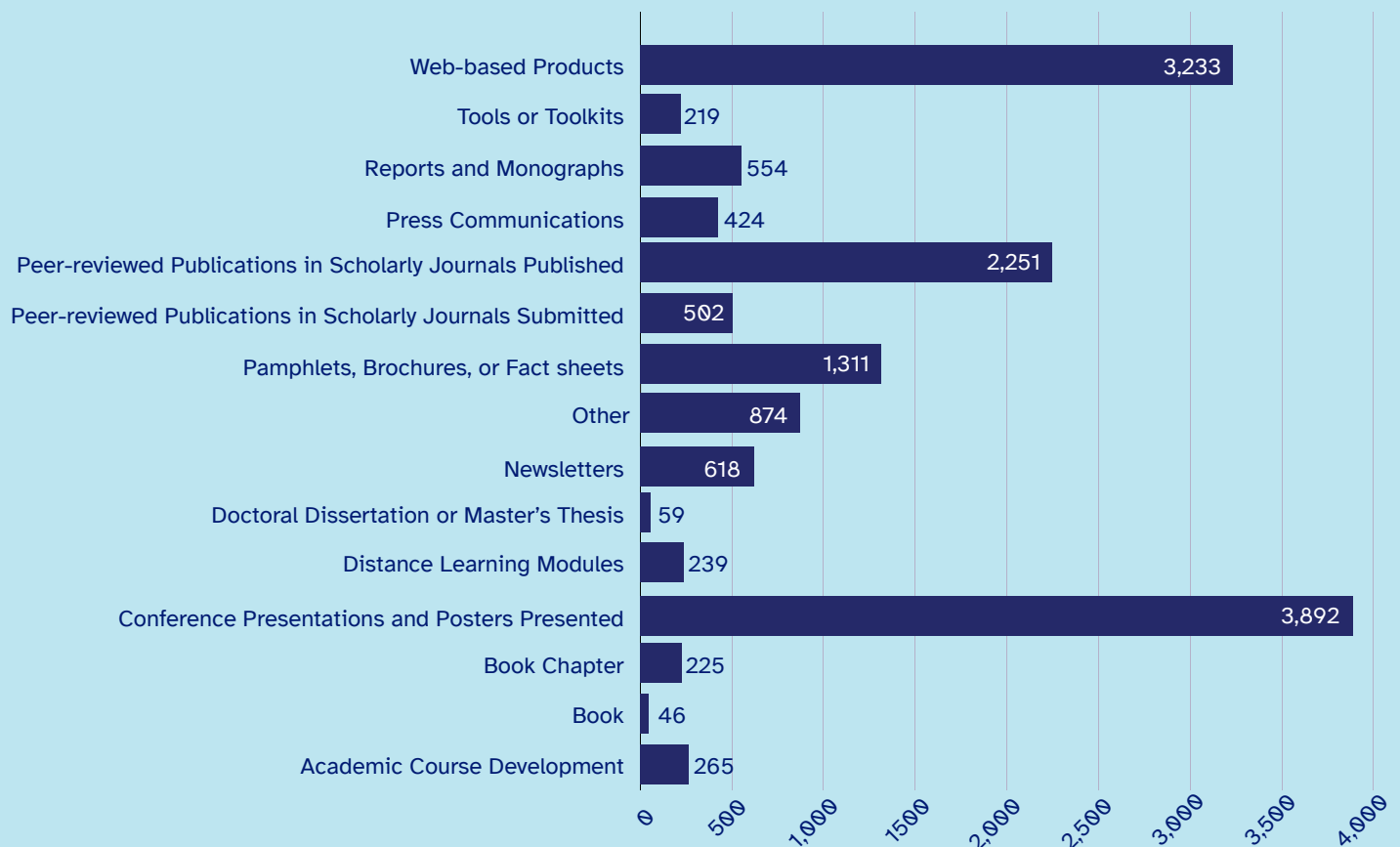Conference presentations and academic courses

4,430
Online modules, fact sheets, media communications

These materials reach tens of millions annually, providing evidence-based information and linking individuals to critical resources for people with disabilities and their families.

FY25 PRODUCTS

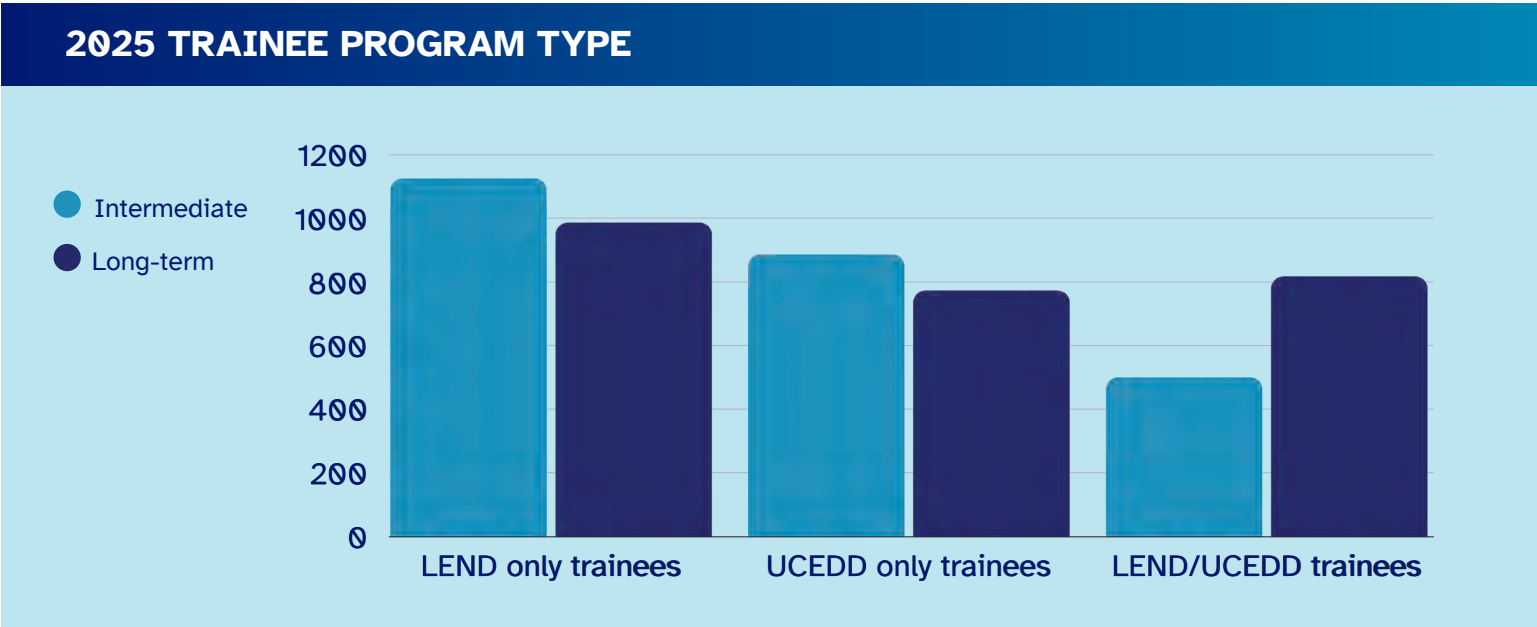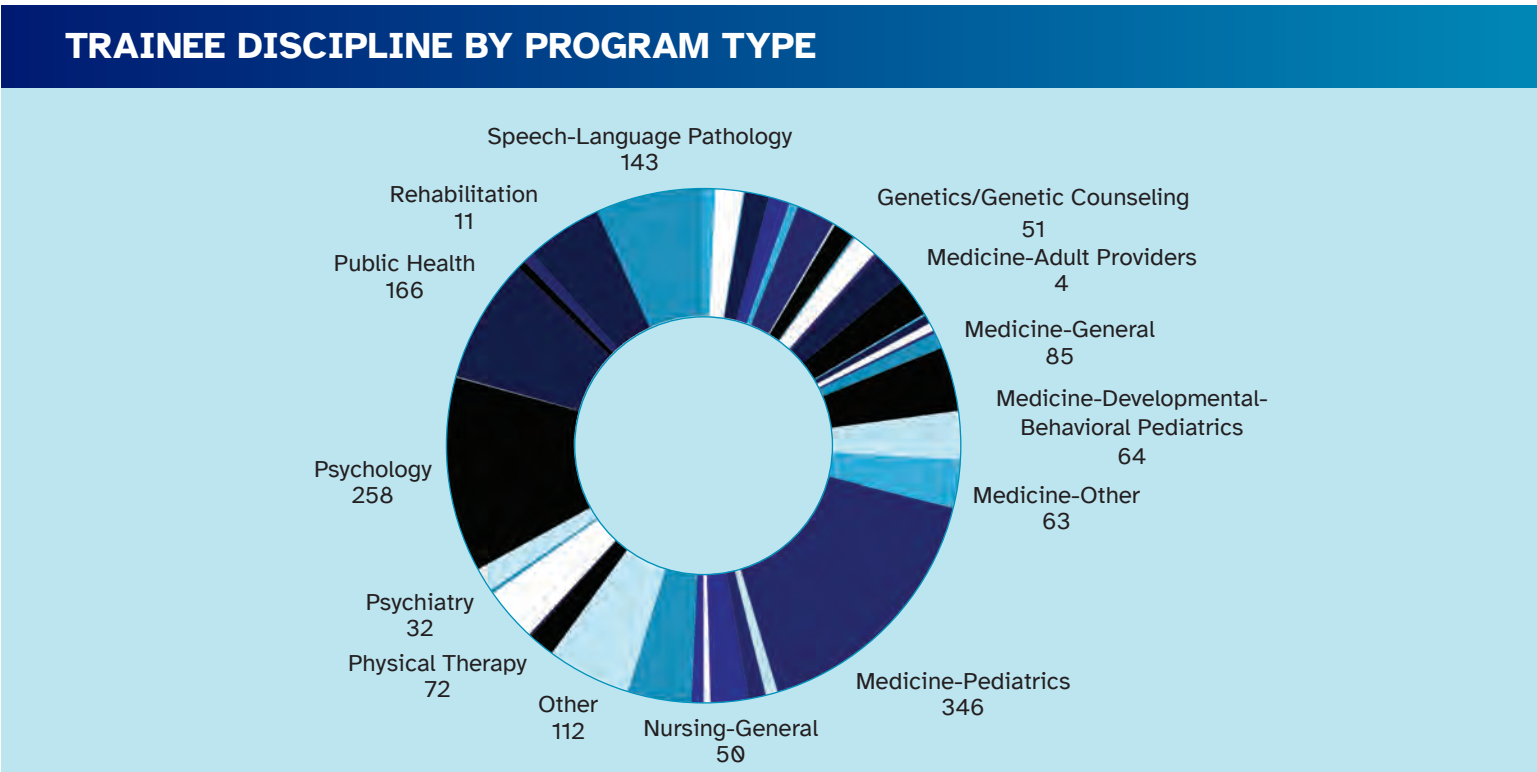| Category	Value
Web-based Products	3,233
Tools or Toolkits	219
Reports and Monographs	554
Press Communications	424
Peer-reviewed Publications in Scholarly Journals Published	2,251
Peer-reviewed Publications in Scholarly Journals Submitted	502
Pamphlets, Brochures, or Fact sheets	1,311
Other	874
Newsletters	618
Doctoral Dissertation or Master's Thesis	59
Distance Learning Modules	239
Conference Presentations and Posters Presented	3,892
Book Chapter	225
Book	46
Academic Course Development	265

AUCD Network Training & Leadership Development

The AUCD Emerging Leaders Community includes current trainees, alumni, early-career professionals, self-advocates, and family members from across all U.S. states and territories. This dynamic group grows thousands each year, unified by a shared commitment to serving, researching, and educating positive change.

Each year, AUCD programs graduate over **5,661** emerging leaders in health, allied health, education, and related fields. These trainees complete rigorous academic and research training, preparing them to lead in their professions.

2025 TRAINEE PROGRAM TYPE

Legend:
- Intermediate
- Long-term

Bar chart values (approximate):
- LEND only trainees: Intermediate ~1120, Long-term ~980
- UCEDD only trainees: Intermediate ~880, Long-term ~770
- LEND/UCEDD trainees: Intermediate ~500, Long-term ~820

In FY25, the AUCD Network trained over **5,600** individuals across **46** disciplines, ranging from medicine and psychology to public health and special education.

TRAINEE DISCIPLINE BY PROGRAM TYPE

Donut chart with the following labels and values:
- Speech-Language Pathology 143
- Rehabilitation 11
- Public Health 166
- Psychology 258
- Psychiatry 32
- Physical Therapy 72
- Other 112
- Nursing-General 50
- Medicine-Pediatrics 346
- Medicine-Other 63
- Medicine-Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics 64
- Medicine-General 85
- Medicine-Adult Providers 4
- Genetics/Genetic Counseling 51

Outreach and Engagement

AUCD promotes the vital work of its members in research, policy, clinical services, and community engagement. By doing so, we reshape perceptions and champion the full inclusion of people with disabilities and their families in all aspects of community life.

Current AUCD audience engagement:

14,000	**17,000**	**2,386**	**1,390**	**3,785**
Email Subscribers	Facebook Fans (@AUCDnetwork)	Instagram Followers (@AUCDpix)	YouTube Subscribers (@AUCDnetwork)	LinkedIn Followers

AUCD Financials

AUCD is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization operating with a **$4.3M** annual budget. The majority of AUCD's funding comes from federal grants and contracts, supplemented by membership dues, event fees, and private donations. Our commitment to efficiency ensures that the maximum resources support our mission and strategic goals.

FY25 Financial Year Highlights:

AUCD FY2025 revenue was **$4,699,845**	Year-end unrestricted net assets were **$2,667,026**	AUCD's reserve fund exceeds **6 months**
AUCD passed to its members **$174,113** in funding	AUCD FY26 projection is over **$698,958** passed to members	Membership dues **were not** increased in FY26

Highlights

Engaging Leaders and Transforming Systems: 2025 AUCD Leadership Academy

Ellie Potts, a Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Practice at the University of Georgia and a GaLEND alumna, shared her experience: *"I'm not sure what I was expecting from the Leadership Academy, but it definitely wasn't what I expected—in the best way possible. It changed the way I was looking at myself and my place in leadership and how I understand my role as a leader."*

Sandra Root-Elledge, Interim Executive Director of AUCD, also reflected on the impact of the Academy: *"Supporting leadership development for the sustainability of the AUCD network is crucial. The Leadership Academy allows participants to apply historical context, engagement with peers and faculty, and new challenges to help frame how they will guide our network. Attending the 2025 Academy allowed me to experience firsthand the energy, passion, and vision of this next generation of network leaders. I left feeling hopeful and optimistic about the future of our network and those we serve."* Read more.

TN DD Network Statewide Joint Needs Assessment

"The joint needs assessment is already informing our UCEDD's clinical services by highlighting service gaps, especially in rural areas, and guiding telehealth expansion efforts for diagnostic evaluations," said Bruce Keisling, Ph.D., executive director of the UTHSC Center on Developmental Disabilities in Memphis. *"Insights from the survey and focus groups are helping the clinical team refine its approach to accessibility and individualized supports. By integrating findings from both community data and direct service experiences, the UCEDD can better respond to real-time needs."*

Researchers at Waisman Center Improve Assessment Protocols Identify Cerebral Palsy Earlier

"When physicians are able to provide an early CP diagnosis, this may help give families an understanding of what supports might be needed for their child, get access to more cerebral palsy-specific information, and understand how their child may benefit from certain therapies and early interventions," says Ellen Sutter, PT, DPT, PhD, lead author on the related recent study publication and former graduate student in Gillick's lab. She is now a postdoctoral researcher at Boston University. Read more.

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Thank You

Federal Partners

HRSA — Maternal & Child Health

CDC — National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD)

ACL — Administration for Community Living

NIH — *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

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