



## AUCD Responds to Full Budget Proposal That Eliminates University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

SILVER SPRING, MD – The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is outraged by the release of the [President's budget](#), which, despite advocacy from the disability community, Dear Colleague Letters with bipartisan support, and a [commitment from Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#) to protect the Developmental Disabilities Network, explicitly proposes the elimination of the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs). In an alarming move, these essential, bipartisan-supported centers have been mischaracterized and targeted under the guise of eliminating so-called “DEI” programs.

The Administration's elimination of anything labeled as “DEI” is dangerous and fundamentally mischaracterizes disability rights. UCEDDs are not political initiatives—they are congressionally-authorized programs and required by law in every state and territory that, for over 60 years, have enjoyed bipartisan support and have provided vital services, conducted evidence-based research, and trained thousands of professionals in every state and territory to improve the lives of people with disabilities and their families. Since the 1960s, UCEDDs have been foundational to the disability service and support system in the U.S., working in partnership with states, communities, and individuals to address real needs across the lifespan. UCEDDs evaluate children with autism, run early intervention programs, train community professionals to work with people with developmental disabilities, provide training and disseminate information to families and self-advocates—all to increase the independence and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities.

“Eliminating UCEDDs under the villainized label of ‘DEI’ is dangerous,” said Lillie Heigl, AUCD's Senior Policy Advisor. “The elimination of UCEDDs from the DD network is yet another example of the Administration's aggressive attack on higher education institutions and people with disabilities, and it is clear that the Secretary and the Administration do not understand our work. This Administration seemingly labels any system or policy it does not like as ‘DEI,’ but diversity, equity, and inclusion are not dirty words—they are central to meeting the range of needs within the developmental disability community. The diversity of human experiences in this community is valuable and powerful, and ignoring it endangers hard-won rights following decades of institutionalization and segregation. Understanding these experiences and fighting for inclusion has been key to the enormous strides that disability advocates have made in making our world more accessible. People with disabilities deserve equitable access to every aspect of society. Cutting funding from the UCEDDs, a key pillar of the DD Network is a step in the wrong direction. The disability community deserves support, not scapegoating.”

The proposal to eliminate UCEDDs threatens the very infrastructure that ensures people with disabilities can live full, healthy lives in their communities. Red state or blue state, UCEDDs are doing invaluable work for their local communities, their states, and for the country.



The full budget confirms the Administration's intention to dismantle key elements of the U.S. disability service system. It follows a disturbing trend: gutting research centers, slashing education funding, and now, eliminating community-based supports under a misleading narrative. The consequences of eliminating UCEDDs will be felt by families, service providers, educators, and people with disabilities in every part of the country.

While not explicitly mentioned in the budget, AUCD is concerned not only for the future of UCEDDs but also for the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) programs and the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRCs). AUCD calls on Congress to fully fund the UCEDDs, LENDs, IDDRCs and all disability-related programs targeted in this budget.

## **Plain Language**

The Administration announced the President's budget for 2026. The President's budget is a suggestion to Congress for how they spend money in agencies and programs, including those that help people with disabilities. AUCD is worried about the budget that came out because the budget would not give any money to the University Centers of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs). The UCEDDs do a lot of important work for people with disabilities and their families and have had support from both Republicans and Democrats in Congress. Now, it is up to Congress how they give money to important programs like UCEDDs. AUCD does not want Congress to follow this budget suggestion because it will be extremely harmful to people with disabilities in lots of ways, including getting rid of UCEDDs.