



AUCD Executive Director Appointment Announcement **Kimberly Knackstedt, PhD**

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) Welcomes Kimberly Knackstedt as Executive Director

Following a national search conducted by the AUCD Search Committee and supported by ProFound Executive Search, The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is pleased to welcome Kimberly Knackstedt as its new Executive Director, effective September 1, 2026. This milestone reflects AUCD's ongoing commitment to amplify and advance the work of the AUCD Network to improve quality of life for people with developmental and other disabilities and their families.

AUCD's history began in 1963, when the first university-based entities were created to support research, education, training and service related to developmental disabilities. Today, AUCD supports a national network of 68 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs), 60 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities (LEND) Programs, and 15 Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers (IDDRCs).

Kimberly brings nearly two decades of accessibility and disability policy experience to this role, spanning education, government, and nonprofit sectors. Most recently, she founded and led Unlock Access, LLC, an accessibility and disability policy consulting firm. Previously, she served in disability policy positions in Congress and the White House. Kimberly was the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Public Policy Fellow, serving on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in 2016. She then served as the disability policy advisor for Chairman Bobby Scott on the Committee on Education and Labor in the U.S. House of Representatives. Next, she was the senior disability policy advisor for Senator Patty Murray on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee in the U.S. Senate. In January 2021, Kimberly was appointed as the first ever director of disability policy for the Domestic Policy Council for the Biden–Harris Administration. Following her experience in the White House, Kimberly was a Senior Fellow at The Century Foundation, Director of the Disability Economic Justice team, and Director of the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative. Kimberly brings experience as a person with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and chronic illnesses to her accessibility and policy perspectives.

Kimberly received her Bachelor of Education in special education and elementary education from Gonzaga University, Master of Science in Education in special education from the University of Kansas, and Ph.D. in special education and policy from the University of Kansas. Several of Kim's close mentors and Ph.D. committee members led and supported the Kansas University Center on Disabilities.

AUCD extends its sincere gratitude to Sandy Root-Elledge for her dedicated service as Interim Executive Director. Her steady leadership, unwavering commitment to AUCD's mission, and thoughtful guidance throughout this transition have positioned the organization for continued

AUCD 8/2026



success. We also thank the members of the Search Committee and Board of Directors for their dedication and commitment throughout this important search process.

We invite our partners and colleagues from across the country to join us at the AUCD National Conference, November 8 - 11, in Washington, D.C., as we celebrate this leadership transition and exciting new chapter for the organization. This will be an opportunity to meet Kimberly in person.

Please join us in welcoming Kimberly Knackstedt as AUCD's 4th Executive Director as the organization embarks on its next chapter of leadership, collaboration, and impact in advancing the well-being of people with disabilities and their families nationwide.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Eppelsheimer
Board President
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)