



# Moving On Up With MEPD

Fall 2009

## WELCOME TO "Moving on Up with MEPD"

MEPD (Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities) allows you to earn money for work and maintain your savings in the bank, which would normally put you over the limit to receive Medicaid. This newsletter is sent to all MEPD members.

You get **Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities (MEPD)** because you:

- Have a disability.
- Are earning money from work.
- Are under 65 years old.

Remember, these things you need to tell your local DHS Income Maintenance Worker:

- When you stop working.
- When you earn more money.
- When you earn less money.
- When you move to a new address.

## Iowa's Employment First Initiative A Call for Change of Historical Proportion

No matter the economy, Iowa will need a strong workforce to help the state prosper and communities grow. Iowans with disabilities must be considered part of that workforce.

To that end, representatives of Iowa's Association of Professionals in Supported Employment (APSE), Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), community rehabilitation providers, Disability Program Navigators, the Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities (MEPD) Advisory Committee through Iowa's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) began planning to move Iowa in a direction to meet this oncoming need.

To assist in setting the strategic direction, an Employment First Summit for the state of Iowa will be held October 2009. Approximately 100 people will be

*The goal of the Employment First initiative is that competitive employment will be the first priority and the expected and preferred outcome of all Iowans with disabilities.*

*For Iowa's Employment First initiative, the definition of competitive employment is:*

- *Regular or customized employment where employees with disabilities are paid by the competitive business (unless self-employed), at minimum or prevailing wage and including benefits*
- *Regular and ordinary opportunities for meaningful interactions with co-workers without disabilities, and/or customers, and/or the general public.*

"According to the 2004 Harris Survey, 35% of people with disabilities work full or part time compared to 78% of people without disabilities. The same report notes that 63% of those people with disabilities who are not working would prefer to work. In 2006 the poverty rate of working-age people with disabilities was reported at 25.4%

invited to attend including people with disabilities, community rehabilitation program personnel, employers, educators, policy makers or legislators, as well as representatives of federal, state, and county system programs.

To prepare for the Summit, 14 facilitated focus groups were held throughout the state to gather grassroots information and begin formulating a vision for Iowa as an Employment First state.

The overriding question posed as each focus group was:

***How do we make competitive employment the 1<sup>st</sup> priority and the expected and preferred outcome for Iowans with disabilities?***

Discussion was focused on:

- ***What do we want to see in place in two years for workers with disabilities***
- ***What is blocking us from our vision?***
- ***What innovative, substantial actions move us toward our vision?***

*Focus group results were summarized and will serve as the basis for the Employment First Summit scheduled for October.*

## “HEART” HEALTHY LAWS!!!

On June 17, 2008, President Bush signed into law H.R. 6081, the Heroes Earning Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2008 (“the HEART Act”). This new law makes AmeriCorps State service accessible to people with disabilities.

### **Q. How does the HEART Act make AmeriCorps more accessible to people with disabilities?**

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal program that provides a monthly cash benefit to low-income individuals who are aged, blind or have a disability. In the past receiving an AmeriCorps living allowance could disqualify an individual from SSI eligibility. The new law directs the Social Security Administration to ignore an individual's receipt of AmeriCorps benefits for purposes of SSI eligibility.

### **Q. Why did Congress make this change?**

This brings all AmeriCorps members (VISTA, AmeriCorps State and NCCC) under one treatment of benefits rules for SSI. (In the past, only AmeriCorps Vista benefits were excluded by law from countable income for SSI purposes.)

### **Q. Which AmeriCorps benefits are excluded from countable income?**

The law now excludes “any benefit (whether cash or in kind)” and so covers the living allowance, health insurance, child care, and the education award (and related interest payments).

### **Q. Why doesn't the law cover both SSI and SSDI?**

The Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a Federal Program that provides money to individuals with disabilities based on their having paid into the insurance program. There are separate laws and regulations for SSDI eligibility and the HEART Act moved through Congress quickly to include SSDI. It is hoped that Congress will extend the AmeriCorps exclusion for SSI eligibility to SSDI in the near future.

### **Q. When does the new law take effect?**

The exclusion of AmeriCorps benefits took effect for benefits payable after August 16, 2008.

### **Q. How many people who want to serve will this new law help?**

While there aren't exact figures, because a relatively higher percentage of national service members self-report as having a disability, it is expected that expanding SSI rule will result in an increase of several hundred individuals with disabilities serving in AmeriCorps State/National each year.

### **Q. Where can I review the HEART Act?**

Refer to the Federal Register of the 110th Congress, Public Law 110-245.

## Gaining More and Giving Back with AmeriCorps State

Each year, hundreds of Iowa men and women give back to their communities by committing their time and talents to service in the AmeriCorps program. AmeriCorps offers full-time and part-time positions and opportunities are available in almost every county in Iowa.

AmeriCorps participants, called members, receive guidance and training specific to their program assignment and to enhance and compliment their talents, interests, abilities and availability. AmeriCorps members receive a modest living allowance, student loan forbearance, and for those who qualify, health coverage and childcare assistance. After successfully completing the term of service, members receive an education award to help pay qualified student loans or finance college, graduate school or vocational training at eligible institutions. Many institutions of higher education, including some in Iowa, match the award dollar for dollar.

For more information about national service opportunities available in Iowa or nationwide, visit [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov), call toll free 1-800-942-2677 or TTY 1.800.833.3722, or visit the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service Web site at [www.volunteeriowa.org](http://www.volunteeriowa.org). Upon request, this material will be made available in alternative forms for people with disabilities.

Iowa is proud of its commitment to inclusion and providing opportunity for all who seek to serve. The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service works to recruit AmeriCorps members with disabilities to national service and provides assistance and referrals to support members who may need accommodations to perform the duties of their service assignments. AmeriCorps benefits (living allowance, health insurance, childcare, and education award) are excluded from countable income for recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI). However, these benefits may have an impact on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) eligibility, so recipients of SSDI benefits should work with their Social Security office if they are considering joining an AmeriCorps program. AmeriCorps offers service opportunities to people age 17 and older without regard to race, color, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation or other non-merit factors. Members must be a U.S. citizen or a national and lawful permanent resident alien.

AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, which improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. In Iowa, the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service administers the AmeriCorps State program.

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## BY THE NUMBERS...IOWANS WITH DISABILITIES 2009

STATE DATA CENTER OF IOWA—WWW.IOWADATACENTER.ORG

On July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, guaranteeing equal opportunity for people with disabilities in public accommodations, commercial facilities, employment, transportation, state and local government services and telecommunications

**63,349**

*The number of Iowa disabled workers in 2007 receiving benefits under Social Security's Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) Program.*

Source: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/docs/factsheets/congstats/2007/ia.html>

**35.9%**

Percentage of people 65 and older in 2007 in Iowa with a disability, the highest of any age group.

**7.0%**

Percentage of Iowa children ages 5 to 15 in 2007 who have a disability. This amounts to 30,002 children.

**81.8%**

Percentage of disabled children in Iowa age 5 to 15 with a mental disability in 2007.

### SPECIFICALLY...

**233,794**

The number of Iowans in 2007 reporting a physical disability, a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying.

**117,089**

The number of Iowans in 2007 reporting a sensory disability such as blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment.

**157,083**

The number of Iowans reporting a mental disability, such as learning, remembering, or concentrating.

**45.1%**

**THE EMPLOYMENT RATE IN 2007 FOR IOWANS WITH A DISABILITY. THE EMPLOYMENT RATE FOR THOSE WITHOUT A DISABILITY AT THAT TIME WAS 81.6%.**

**106,296**

The number of Iowans in 2007 who reported that a disability made it difficult to go outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office.

**397,420**

The number of people in Iowa in 2007 who have some kind of disability. They represent 14.5% of the civilian noninstitutionalized population age 5 and over.

**120,739**

The number of Iowans in 2007 who reported that a disability made it difficult to work at a job or business.

**123,222**

The number of Iowans ages 16-64 with a physical disability in 2007. The number of people 65 and over with a physical disability was 106,967.

**52.1%**

Over half of all the people in Iowa in 2007 with a sensory disability are aged 65 and over. People 16-64 account for 43.2 percent while children 5-15 make up only 4.8 percent of the total.

### EDUCATION...

**85.7%**

The percent of Iowans in 2007 with a disability who have a high school degree or higher. The percent of Iowans without a disability who have a High School degree or higher is 93.5%.

**4.7%**

The percent of Iowans with a disability in 2007 who have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. The percent of Iowans without a disability who have a Bachelor's degree or higher is 17.3%.

### INCOME AND POVERTY...

**\$15,263**

Media earning for Iowans age 16 and over with disabilities with earnings in 2007. The median earning for Iowans age 16 and over with earnings in 2006 without disabilities is \$27,207.

**20.0%**

The poverty rate for Iowans with disabilities in 2007. The poverty rate for Iowans without disabilities is 9.0%.

## TAKE NOTE!!

Each year, since 1945, America recognizes October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The theme for the 2009 National Disability Employment Awareness Month is "Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation." This year's theme emphasizes the vision of ODEP (Office of Disability Employment Policy), a world in which people with disabilities have unlimited employment opportunities. October continues to be a time to recognize the talents and contributions of Americans with Disabilities. It is the opportunity to acknowledge our nation's commitment to advancing employment opportunities for all citizens. As they fill positions, employers are urged to consider America's diversity by considering the talents and skills of all workers, including those with disabilities.

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## Everyone Wins When Everyone Serves: A Case Study of Inclusive Service

(written by Mike Hoenig from the Center for Disabilities and Development at the University of Iowa)

One motto of AmeriCorps is "Everyone Can Serve." Norma Boge signed up as an AmeriCorps State member with Iowa Legal Aid, and is proof that this is more than just a slogan.

Norma worked as an AmeriCorps State member with clients served through Iowa Legal Aid's Legal Hotline for Older Iowans.

"I call clients to see if they've followed up on our attorney's recommendations," said Norma. "If they have not, I determine what barriers are getting in the way and suggest solutions to the client. If the issue has been resolved, I recommend that the case be closed," she explained.

Said Norma, "I learned about this opportunity from my Iowa Department for the Blind counselor." Since I have a strong interest in law and previous work experience in advocacy, serving

with Iowa Legal Aid sounded like the perfect fit for me."

"Once we had scheduled my first interview with Iowa Legal Aid, I disclosed my blindness," Norma said. "Gail Klearman, the Legal Aid AmeriCorps State program director, was great. She emailed all the required forms to me in accessible format, and I was able to fill them out easily."

Then, prior to Norma's start date, an Iowa Department for the Blind Technology Specialist conducted an IT assessment at Iowa Legal Aid to ensure Iowa Legal Aid had the right accommodations so Norma had the tools she needed to be successful.

"The technology specialist noted that most computer applications used at Iowa Legal Aid are compatible with my screen reading program, and made some helpful recommendations to make my service easier," Norma explained.

"Everyone at my national service site has been great, and I'm feeling more comfortable in my role every day," said Norma. "Regardless of what happens in the future, this is a fantastic experience!"

## Microboard Basics Training Sessions

Iowa's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, in partnership with the University of Iowa, sponsored an information workshop on Microboards in May 2009. A followup session was held in June 2009. A microboard is a small group of committed family, friends, and other community members who join together with an individual who has a disability (focus person) to create a non-profit corporation. The microboard manages support services needed by a consumer. A microboard can also choose to be the consumer's provider and would receive "agency-level" funding once they complete necessary requirements. Microboards have directors, charters, bylaws and hold regular meetings in their efforts to develop and implement their consumer's person-centered plan.

Ruthie Beckwith, Executive Director of the Tennessee Microboard Association led the discussion and shared success stories experienced by individuals in her state. One of the required steps to form a microboard is the development of a PATH—Planning Alternatives Tomorrows with Hope. During this process a consumer is prompted to identify his or her hopes and dreams by a trained volunteer PATH facilitator, family members, friends, and other community supporters. The PATH plan is the guiding document used by the microboard and others to provide the necessary support to accomplish the goals described in the PATH.

Tami Mugler, president of the Microboard, HarliCan, Inc., (established for her daughter) and Ruthie both shared stories and personal accounts illustrating the value of the principles of self-determination: freedom, authority, support, and responsibility in all areas of living, learning and working in communities. Harli Can, Inc. is the first approved microboard in Iowa.

Interested individuals decided to form a Steering Committee to work on establishing a Microboard Association in Iowa. This group will be responsible for providing information, outreach activities, trainings, and technical assistance for anyone interested in microboards or a PATH.

For more information about microboards: visit: [www.microboard.org](http://www.microboard.org); [www.tnmicroboards.org](http://www.tnmicroboards.org); or [www.gamicroboards.org](http://www.gamicroboards.org)

If you are interested in additional information about PATH plans: [www.inclusion.com](http://www.inclusion.com)

For more information about the Iowa project and the formation of Iowa's Microboard Association contact Tammie Amsbaugh. E-mail: [tamsbau@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:tamsbau@dhs.state.ia.us).

### MEPD Advisory Committee Membership List

Sherry Becker  
Mason City

Dustin Bushnell  
Des Moines

Raymond Gerke  
Woodward

Larry and Lorraine Hoffman  
Clear Lake

William R. Houck  
Des Moines

Dave Lenz  
Des Moines

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Kelley Pennington  
Des Moines

Maureen Schletzbaum  
Indianola

Sheila Stoeckel  
Mason City

Mike Williams  
Des Moines

#### Staff

Tamara Amsbaugh  
Iowa Medicaid Enterprise  
E-mail: [tamsbau@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:tamsbau@dhs.state.ia.us)

Matt Haubrich  
Department of Human Services  
E-mail: [mhaubri@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:mhaubri@dhs.state.ia.us)

Sarah Renner  
Iowa Medicaid Enterprise  
E-mail: [srenner@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:srenner@dhs.state.ia.us)

Jennifer Steenblock  
Iowa Medicaid Enterprise  
E-mail: [jsteenb@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:jsteenb@dhs.state.ia.us)

Jill Whitten  
Department of Human Services  
E-mail: [jwhitte@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:jwhitte@dhs.state.ia.us)

**People with disabilities, advocates, policy administrators, employers, and medical professionals working together to enhance opportunities for Iowans with disabilities to work and live as they choose.**