

North Dakota Centers for Independent Living

To: Senate Appropriations-Human Resources Division
From: North Dakota's Centers for Independent Living
Subject: Funding for Independent Living Programming in SB 2012
Date: 1/25/2023

Chairmen Dever and Members of the Committee,

My name is Royce Schultze, Executive Director of Dakota Center for Independent Living, Inc. I am here today to speak in support of the full funding for Centers for Independent Living in SB 2012.

All Centers for Independent Living are required to provide five core services, which are: **Independent Living Skills Training, Individual and Systems Advocacy, Peer Counseling, Information and Referral, and Transition from institutional settings to community living, as well as for youth who are out of school.** We also provide community services such as **systems advocacy, community education, accessibility consultations, and outreach.**

One of the most important things to understand about the value of Independent Living is that we are, at our core, people with disabilities serving other people with disabilities. Over half of our staff are persons with disabilities. We are people who have faced obstacles and barriers, fought back, overcame them, and have now dedicated our lives to doing our part to help others achieve their dreams.

Centers for Independent Living are consumer driven, and consumer led. In addition to our staff, over half of our management and board of directors are also persons with disabilities. Our disabilities are as varied as those of the people we serve, and our staff is also trained and capable professionals. The average Independent Living staff in North Dakota has 11 years of experience. Our staff has college degrees in areas like Social Work, Education, Rehabilitation Counseling, Vocational Evaluation, Developmental Disabilities, Psychology, Communication, and more.

Eligibility for Independent Living services is not based on disability type or age. It is based on very simple criteria:

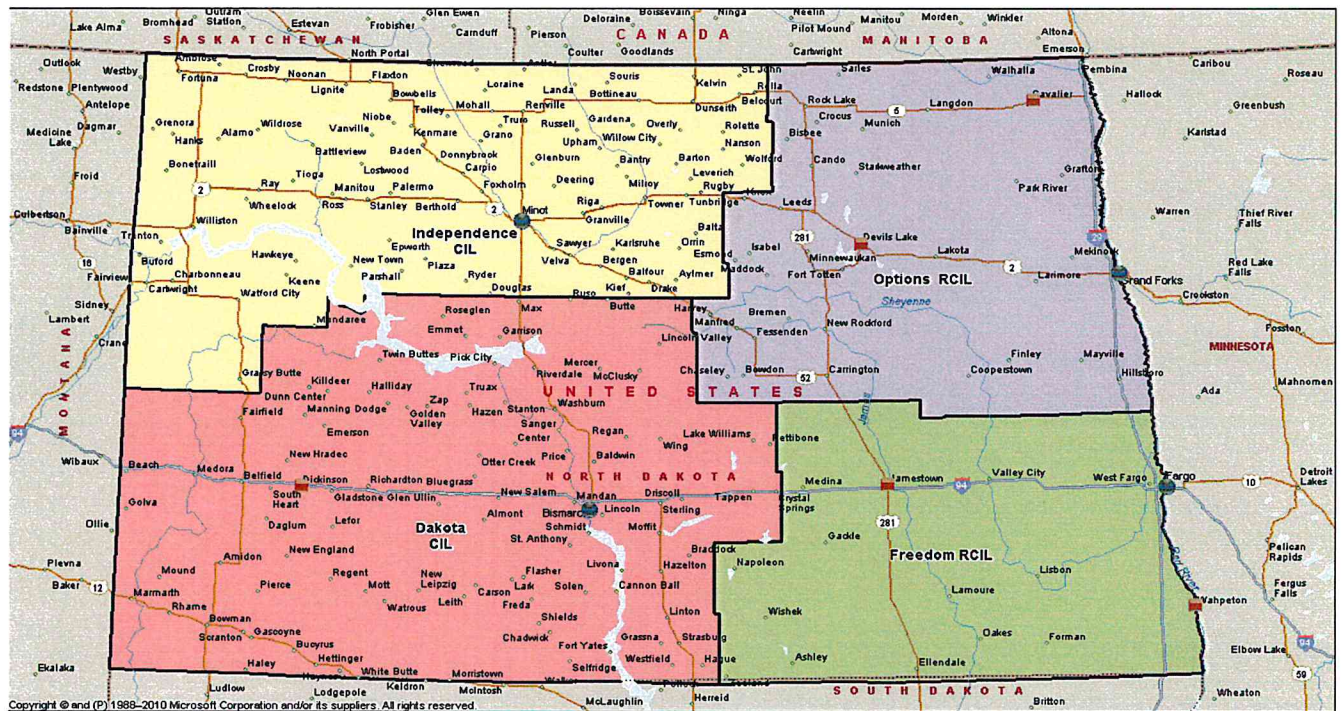
- Are you a person with a disability?
- Does that disability affect one or more of your major life areas?
- Do you want Independent Living Services?
- Are you willing to set a goal and do your part to achieve that goal?

It is the self-determination that is inherent in how we do things that makes our programming so successful. There is much focus on Person Centered planning as a

best practice in today's service delivery model, however, without solid self-determination, Person Centered planning will never succeed.

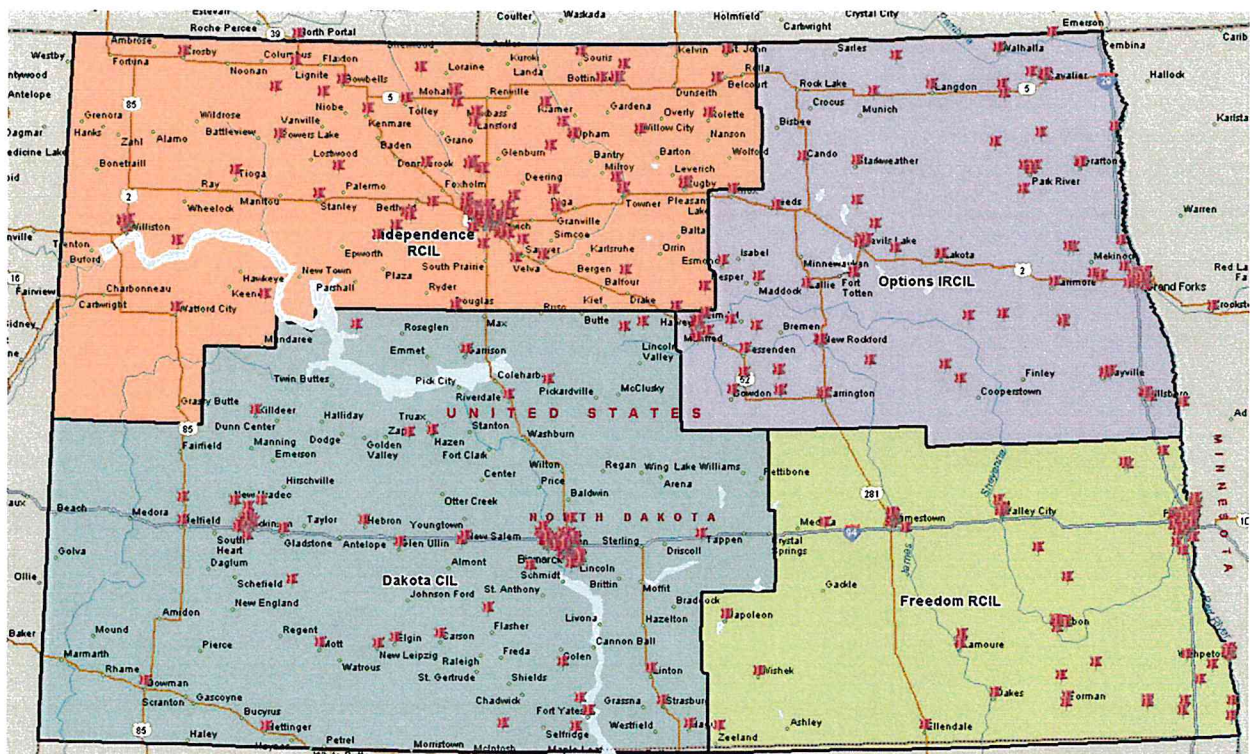
In your handout (see figure 1), you can see a map of the four Centers for Independent Living in our state and the area they serve. As you can see, Dakota Center for Independent Living serves the southwestern part of the state, Freedom Resource Center serves the southeastern area, Options Interstate Center serves the northeastern part, and Independence, Inc. serves the northwestern quadrant.

Center Service Areas Figure 1



The funding provided by the state of North Dakota has been a game changer in our ability to serve North Dakotans with disabilities. We have presented you with a map with a pin showing the address of each of the people served by a Center in the past two years (see figure 2). As you can see, despite our limited funding, we have been able to provide a variety of services across the state.

North Dakota Centers for Independent Living Direct Service Distribution Map Figure 2



As you listen to the testimony on all the programming in SB 2012, it has to seem overwhelming and, at times, difficult to understand all the programs and services available to North Dakotans. As I am sure you have discovered, the services and supports available to people with disabilities vary greatly depending on age and medical diagnosis.

But, as Centers for Independent Living, we serve all types of disabilities (see figure 3). In the past year, 36.1% of the people we serve have cognitive disabilities, such as learning disabilities or autism, 35.3% people are people with physical disabilities, such as spinal cord injury, arthritis, or cerebral palsy, 20.3% are people with mental health type disabilities, like depression, substance abuse disorder, or bipolar disorder, and about 1% each are who are Deaf/hard of hearing or Blind/visually impaired. Around 6% of the people we served reported multiple disabilities.

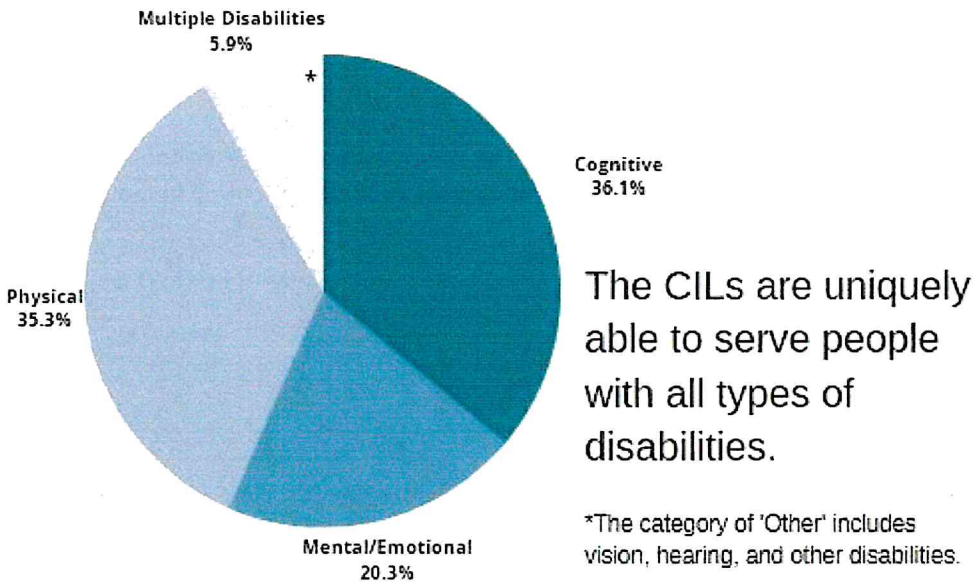
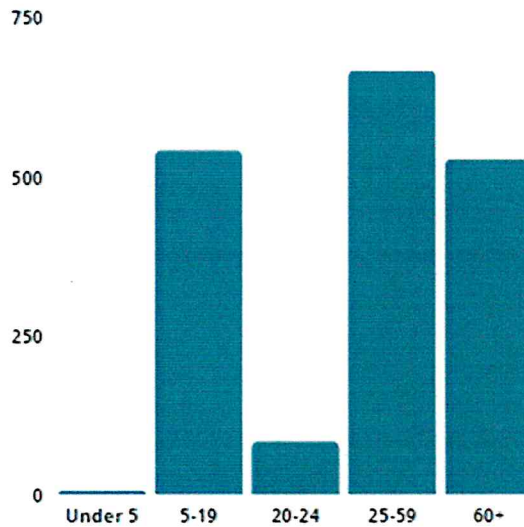


Figure 3

We also serve all ages (see figure 4). This includes 29% under the age of 19, 5% age 20-24, 42% between the ages of 25-59, and 24% age 60 or over.

Figure 4



The Centers for Independent Living have not had a substantial increase in State Independent Living Funding since the 2015 Legislative session. In 2016, the centers received \$970,766 in general funds, if inflation is calculated through 2022, our general funds received would be \$2,154,179. Currently, centers receive \$1,681,065 for the 2021-23 biennium. That is a difference of \$473,414.

We are before you requesting an increase of \$473,414 inflationary increase to bring our total funding to \$2,154,179 for the 2023-25 biennium.

As we talk about our need for funding, please remember that our network has never been fully funded. According to a study we commissioned back in 2015, it would take over \$8,000,000 to fully fund our network and meet the needs of every person with a disability in our state. The fact that we are so far from that number means each of our local Centers must make the decision on how best to spend our limited resources and to provide the best impact for our investment in our individual communities.

The lack of additional funding has made it more difficult to provide independent living services to people of all ages with all types of disabilities. The lack of an increase in funding has forced us to be innovative and creative in how we respond to the increased needs for our services. However, there is a limit to how long innovation and efficiency work, and starting with the 2018 federal fiscal year, we have seen a decrease in the number of FTE's we have dedicated to Independent Living Programming in North Dakota and the number of people we are able to serve.

With flat level funding, we have two fewer staff across the state working under the Independent Living Programming Grant, and we are serving fewer consumers per year

Independent Living is cost effective and a smart investment for the state. It is part of the solution to the ever-increasing costs of long-term care, it is an alternative to the high cost of dependency, and it is the right thing to do. People who live independently live longer, they are happier, and it saves the taxpayer money.

I would gladly answer any questions you may have.

Center for Independent Living Executive Directors

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