



PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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Advocates for Idahoans with disabilities encourage the Legislature to accept \$64 million in federal funds to enhance professional services for home-based and community care

BOISE – (Friday, April 16, 2021) – Six statewide organizations that advocate for Idaho children and adults with disabilities are urging the Idaho Legislature to accept \$64 million in federal funds to dramatically boost services and training for Home and Community-Based Services in the state. More than 10,000 Idahoans with disabilities could benefit from the relief, officials said.

School closures, direct care workforce shortages, the COVID-19 pandemic, and program closures have caused many people with disabilities to go without necessary therapies and supports over the last year, causing reversions in behavior and well-being, officials said. One unfortunate outcome has been a dramatic increase in recent requests for residential treatment of children.

The Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services program allows children and adults with disabilities to receive services in their home and community rather than in institutions. The American Rescue Plan Act provided an option for states to increase federal matching funds for this program from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022 -- \$16 million in State FY 2021 and \$48 million in State FY 2022 (\$64 million total).

No additional state dollars would be needed to enact this federal relief option, but the Idaho Legislature does need to approve the acceptance of the funds, officials said. Advocates believe those dollars could provide crucial, much-needed assistance that would not occur any other way.

“There are endless opportunities where we could use the \$64 million,” said Mel Leviton, Executive Director of the Idaho State Independent Living Council. “We see it as an opportunity to build stronger, more cohesive programs that are sustainable in the long-run.”

Personal care services, rehabilitative services, respite care, home health aides, behavioral management, and developmental therapies all could be enhanced, officials said. For example, well-trained, experienced professional therapists are desperately needed to help Idaho families cope with their own children who have a mix autism and mental health illness, which can include managing aggressive behavior, officials said.

“I am the mother of a child who has experienced countless mental health crises due to co-existing mental health and developmental disabilities,” says Brittany Shipley, a mom who lives in the Wood River Valley who’s also the executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Wood River chapter. “He needs support, and he needs it now. Evidence illustrates that early intervention is the best

practice, and what's what I am seeking. I want my son to receive this critical intervention before he reaches adulthood." See [Brittany's video clip](#) about this issue.

Other Idaho families in similar circumstances have had to send their children to out-of-state care facilities at a cost of \$50,000 a year. Because those children are covered under the Medicaid waiver and their parents live in Idaho, IDHW must pay for the cost of out-of-state care.

Denise Wetzel of Moscow had to take her son, Joshua, to the Copper Hills mental health facility in Salt Lake City. "Do I even need to state that this was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my entire life?" she said. "We wanted to help him in our home within our own community."

Mike Sandvig, an Idaho Falls resident who is retired from INL, has a child with a similar two-pronged disability, autism and mental health issues. "These kids need lots of attention, so they do much better in a home environment than an institution," he said. "There's a real need for people who would be trained to deal with the combination of developmental disabilities and severe mental illness." See [Mike's video clip](#) about this issue.

"Over the past several years, our office has taken calls from families who are frequently in crisis due to a lack of supports and services for their children who have significant behavioral concerns," said Angela Lindig, Executive Director of Idaho Parents Unlimited. "In the last year, we've seen an increase in these calls as well as calls from parents who are desperate to find resources for their children who are struggling with severe anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues which were only exacerbated by COVID-19.

"The stories from families who are in these situations are truly gut wrenching," Lindig said. "Families desperately need training themselves as well as trained providers who can work with the children to stabilize them and keep them in their homes and safely keep families together."

"Families have been struggling with this issue for many years and COVID-19 has only amplified the need for training and support," adds Christine Pisani, executive director of the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities. "The ability to use these funds to provide desperately needed training will help keep our families together and avoid out-of-home placements. This issue is facing families in every corner of the state. It's heart-breaking."

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