

# IL-NA

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## **Independent Living Needs Assessment of Wyoming Residents with Disabilities Executive Summary**

*Prepared for the  
Wyoming Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

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March 31, 2013

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## INDEPENDENT LIVING NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF WYOMING RESIDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this needs assessment is to increase knowledge about the independent living needs of Wyoming residents with disabilities and provide documentation for the Wyoming State Plan for Independent Living.

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### METHODS

Background for the needs assessment was laid by examining the 2010 U.S. Census data from the American Community Survey, the 2010 RSA 704 Reports, and the 2010 Social Security Administration data on beneficiaries of disability benefits.

The design for the needs assessment was to conduct two surveys, one with Independent Living consumers and a second survey with service providers for people with disabilities. The University Of Utah Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved procedures for these surveys. The “consumer survey” was mailed to approximately 1800 individuals with disabilities living in the state who had received services from the two Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in Wyoming during federal fiscal year 2011. The “provider survey” was emailed to a list of organizations and individuals who were identified as providing services to people with disabilities in Wyoming. A method called “snowball sampling” was used to allow for the survey to be sent to a broad network of people who met the criteria for “provider” but were unknown to the research group. The original list contained over 170 email addresses identified by the researchers and the advisory group, and it is believed a much larger number received the survey invitation. A third method of obtaining input was through community meetings in four communities. Participants at the meetings represented individuals with disabilities and service providers. Data collection was guided by six research questions.

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### DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN WYOMING

Wyoming has the same proportion of people with disabilities in the state as the U.S. as a whole, approximately 12%. However, the percentage of people with an independent living difficulty in Wyoming is lower than in the nation. The Wyoming working age population (ages 18-64) is estimated as having 2.7% of the population with an independent living difficulty compared with 3.4%

nationwide. Among persons aged 65 and older, 12.9% of the population in Wyoming has an independent living difficulty, compared with 16.4% nationwide.

In examining Social Security Administration records for 2010, we see that people with disabilities in Wyoming are less likely to access public disability benefits (SSDI and SSI) compared to the nation as a whole. Wyoming has 3.7% of the population that receives SSDI compared with 4.6% in the nation. And the state has less than half the proportion of SSI recipients than the U.S as a whole with 1.2% of the Wyoming residents receiving SSI compared with 2.6% in the U.S.

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## SURVEY RESULTS

The number of returned consumer surveys was 510. Geographic distribution of survey responses was 66% representing eastern counties, and 34% representing western Wyoming counties. Consumer respondents represented an older age group with 58% indicating they were over 65 years of age while 3% were 30 years of age and younger. When comparing these percentages with the total population served by CILs in Wyoming, the numbers are similar to the 2010 “704 Reports” with 59% of CIL consumers over 60 and 1.5% of consumers under age 20. The number of returned provider surveys was 188. Geographic distribution of provider survey responses was 38% representing eastern counties, 42% representing western counties, and 20% representing providers that serve Wyoming residents statewide.

The report is organized to respond to six research questions.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 1: ARE THERE UN-SERVED AND UNDER-SERVED POPULATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN WYOMING, AND IF YES, WHAT ARE THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

Consumers responded that 60% of them feel they are receiving all of the services they need to live as independently as possible. Consumer responses to eleven service needs were ranked and then compared between residents of eastern and western counties. The lists were the same across eastern and western counties for the first four ranked items. “Other housing options” (if they wanted to move) was the top need, followed by “accessible entertainment and recreation” in second and third place, and “adequate high school transition services” in fourth ranked position. Consumers in the western region ranked “accessible transportation” and “other transportation to meet their needs” in fifth and sixth place, while consumers in the eastern region ranked “accessible retail businesses” and “medical and dental services” in fifth and sixth place. Consumers in both regions ranked “accessibility of the place [they] live,” and “the place they live meets [their] needs” in tenth and eleventh place. Thus the needs are very similar across the state, with western region consumers indicating a greater need for accessible transportation services and eastern region consumers indicating greater need for accessible retail businesses and medical and dental services than the former.

Providers responded that only 36% of consumers are receiving the services they need to help them become more independent. In response to the need questions, providers had different priorities than consumers. The eastern county providers placed adequate and accessible housing as number one and number three priorities, with entertainment and recreation options in the second spot, and

accessible retail businesses in last place. Western county providers placed adequate housing as number one and adequate and accessible transportation as number two and three priorities. The higher ranking of transportation by providers in western counties is similar to that of consumers in western counties.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF YOUTH IN TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL, WORK, AND THE COMMUNITY?

Providers had many more responses to the question about high school transition services than did consumers. This is most likely explained by the advanced age of the consumer respondents and the fact that transition services from high school are not pertinent. The question was open-ended and responses were categorized according to 15 common themes. The most frequent comments were about the need for agency collaboration for effective planning with families. Providers requested more services for supported and transitional housing, vocational training, work experience in real job sites, and independent living skills such as cooking and money management. Many respondents commented that community-based transition services outside the school system seem to be limited to individuals who are eligible for the Medicaid Waiver, and that many more families need these services. Other critical services identified for transition age youth include job placement assistance, supported employment, career planning, transportation training, and recreation activities. Several respondents would like programs that support young people with disabilities to attend college, and partnerships with business to create employment opportunities. Finally, there needs to be more frequent and effective dissemination of information about agencies and service programs for both parents and providers.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT DO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES KNOW ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS IN WYOMING?

Consumers were asked how familiar they are with independent living services in Wyoming. More than half (56%) of consumers were familiar or very familiar with a specific Center for Independent Living and one quarter (25%) are not familiar or not at all familiar. Providers indicate 79% were familiar or very familiar with services for people with disabilities in their area with only 3% not familiar or not at all familiar.

In response to open-ended questions about the best way to inform people with disabilities about independent living services in Wyoming, consumers identified newspaper and television, brochures in doctor's offices, direct mail, and senior centers. Providers on the other hand, identified outreach presentations as the most effective way to inform the public about independent living. Suggestions were made for CIL staff to make presentations to human service agency staff, APS and LTC team meetings, Wyoming ADRCs, organizations such as People First and the Arc, and churches. Also suggested were public service announcements, feature stories on television and radio, social media, and the Internet, including webinars.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 4: WHAT IS THE PERCEPTION ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (CILS) AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES?

Surveys asked providers if they believed that people with disabilities are receiving the services they need to live independently. Only about one-third (36%) of providers agree "definitely" or "very

definitely” that people with disabilities are receiving services they need to live independently, while 18 percent said “definitely not.” When asked how familiar they are with a specific CIL, approximately half of the providers responded that they are not familiar with independent living service agencies in Wyoming (56% are not familiar with WSIL and 47% are not familiar with WILR). Therefore, it is not surprising that approximately half (47%) of all providers stated they do not understand the services provided by independent living centers. Approximately one third of provider organizations make referrals to an independent living center (33% make referrals to WSIL and 39% make referrals to WILR).

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR PEER COUNSELING?

Peer counseling is one of the four core services required for a federally funded Center for Independent Living to provide. The consumer survey contained questions asking respondents about the respondent’s interest in receiving “peer mentoring” and willingness to be trained to become a peer mentor to other individuals with disabilities. Approximately 27% of consumers are interested or very interested in receiving peer mentoring. A smaller group, 19% of all respondents is interested in being trained to become peer mentors.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 6: WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF CIVIC INVOLVEMENT BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN WYOMING, AND WHAT DO THEY KNOW ABOUT DISABILITY RIGHTS?

Civic involvement was defined for purposes of this question as awareness and understanding of civil rights for people with disabilities, as well as involvement in influencing public policy. Both surveys asked respondents how familiar they were with the rights of people with disabilities. Thirty-five percent of consumers and 78% of providers indicated they are familiar with the civil rights of people with disabilities.

Consumers were then asked if they had ever been in a situation where they felt their rights or the rights of another person with a disability had been violated. About one quarter or 26% of consumers felt they had been in a situation where their rights had been violated. Providers were not asked this question. A follow-up to the previous question asked consumers if they had been in such a situation where rights were violated, did they know where to go to get help. Only respondents who answered “yes” to the question about their rights being violated were selected for this question (N=126). Among these respondents, only 29% indicated they knew where to go to get help for the situation of a rights violation.

Providers were asked the same question of whether they knew where to go to get help for a rights violation of a person with disabilities. A large majority (84%) of providers responded definitely they knew where to go to get help.

Consumers were asked if they had ever advocated for an issue that affected them by contacting a local or state government official. The question for providers asked if they had advocated for “an issue that affected people with disabilities” by contacting a local or state government official. On a scale of one to five, 13% of consumers responded they had frequently contacted a government official and 73%% indicated seldom or never. In contrast, 40% of providers indicated they had

frequently contacted a government official about a disability-related issue while 33% indicated seldom or never.

Both consumers and providers were asked the identical question about their interest in being part of a new group that supports people to advocate for disability issues. To this question, 23% of consumers said they were interested, and 46% of providers said they were interested in being part of a new group that supports people to advocate for disability issues.

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## COMMUNITY MEETING RESULTS

Four community meetings were held in different locations around the state during October 2012. Discussion focused on the same topics covered in the surveys. Face-to-face meetings with focused discussions are valuable because they provide additional perspective and depth to survey data. Results of the discussions identify the needs and concerns of people from different locations.

WORLAND. The Worland meeting was attended by a representative from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The discussion centered on the barriers to obtaining services in a rural area including housing and transportation. The VR representative believes there would be an interest in peer mentoring among individuals involved with Big Horn Enterprises. Discussion about sources of information for people to learn about independent living services include public television and commercial radio stations, including stations broadcast from Utah and Montana. Local newspapers are usually willing to run local interest stories.

CODY. The meeting in Cody was attended by several representatives of a local community mental health program, and staff from an independent living center. The stigma associated with having a mental illness was identified as a significant barrier to being integrated into the community. Gaps in available transportation and employment were also discussed. There is a program called “Wyoming Disabled Hunters” that focuses on outdoor recreation to provide people with disabilities an outdoor experience. Group members discussed a letter writing campaign organized by the state chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness as an example of statewide advocacy. There is not a disability advocacy group in western Wyoming but one participant believed there is interest in creating one. The group talked about organizing activities between Hope House members and WSIL. The group brainstormed about how to disseminate information about services, and suggested first, a statewide website with specific information for counties, and second, using local businesses to post announcements.

DOUGLAS. In Douglas, the primary focus of discussion was on the need for services for transition aged youth and young adults. Some in the group were educators and parents. The educators expressed concern about the lack of services for youth ready to leave the school system. The high schools are serving students between 18 and 21 who have jobs but will need support when they exit the school system to maintain their jobs. They discussed the fact that the Medicaid Waiver does not fund supported employment, and that there is great need for a local service provider to provide employment, housing, and recreation services for young adults. The group also discussed the lack of public transportation in the immediate area. A discussion about recreation opportunities was mixed,

with some participants believing there are adequate opportunities in Douglas through a community recreation center and Special Olympics. However, others are of the opinion that there are very few recreation activities for adults with disabilities who are no longer involved with school. Group members talked about how disability advocacy efforts several years ago used to be much stronger and better organized than they are now. They expressed the opinion that “Meet Your Legislator Day” is a good opportunity to meet one’s representative at the State Capitol, but that there is very little “true advocacy” that occurs on that day. In addressing the question about sources of information, the group suggested the Casper newspaper is a good source of information, and a newspaper out of South Dakota is read by residents of the northeast corner of the state. They also mentioned both the Parent Information Center and Uplift program newsletters as effective ways to disseminate information about independent living.

CASPER. State human services employees, a private residential provider, a parent of a child with disabilities, and staffs from an independent living center attended the meeting in Casper. The group discussed the four different Waivers in Wyoming and the problem of a waiting list to receive Waiver services. Low income housing is a problem for all, and is a big barrier to moving people out of nursing homes into the community. The group discussed the lack of day and employment services for adults with mental illness and brain injury. For recreation in the area, there are opportunities through the Hogadon Ski area that has adaptive ski equipment. The group admitted that the cost of many of the opportunities limits people living on low incomes. Staff from WILR described a program they began last year called “Living Well with a Disability.” One goal for the program is to develop leaders who could become peer counselors or mentors.