

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING  
QUARTERLY MEETING: June 16, 2023  
Hybrid Meeting

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Members Present: Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Janette Fulton, Melissa Hutzal, Lee Sheffield, Amy Letteri, Debi Shostak, Kallie Mendenhall, Alexander Van Hook, Mark Beall, Tom Foley, Becky Lorah, Joe Hohenstein

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director), Dee Dee Keiser, Joe Attaardo, Denise Brown

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley – Sassaman

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

**Review and Approval of Minutes:**

The March 24, 2023 meeting minutes were reviewed. Janette made a motion to pass with no corrections. Kallie seconded. Minutes were approved.

**Guest Speaker:** Heather Snyder and Christina Derhammer, Step Up Services, LLC

Step up Services has secured the contract for SSP services within the state. Since beginning services, data collected has been favorable with 32 requests completed, 113 hours and 16 customers in March, 50 requests completed, 170.5 hours and 22 customers in April and 55 requests completed, 202.5 hours and 32 customers in May. Step Up Services has enjoyed great collaboration with other agencies such as DHH and BBVS. Their goal is to continue to build relationships to benefit DeafBlind individuals. Their trained Support Service Providers have a variety of experiences in the community with DeafBlind individuals from baseball games to grocery stores. They partner with DeafBlind people to empower them to be as independent as they can be, guiding, navigating, explaining the environment, and giving access to the world. This is a PA statewide program. SSP's are paid \$20 an hour.

**Guest Speaker:** SSP Training Program Overview

Robin and Jessica discussed the training process for new SSP candidates. The training program is based on data from the DeafBlind community across the country and has been vetted for its proven strategies. The new training consists of a hybrid model including online learning modules and in-person training. After submission of an application and the necessary clearances, approved SSP candidates will complete the approximately 8 hours of online training. The modules cover a variety of topics such as overview of conditions, communication methods and accommodations, DeafBlind culture, human guiding and how to provide access to visual and environmental information. After the online training, the candidates

will participate in a 2-part second half which includes 2-hour virtual sessions followed by an all day in-person workshop. The in-person workshop will be on how to be an effective SSP and provide opportunities for hands-on application of the skills that have been learned. In addition, the in-person will provide opportunities for candidates to learn from and interact with members of the local DeafBlind community via a panel presentation and 1-1 SSP activities. Upon successful completion of the training, the new SSP will be connected to the agency coordinating SSP services. The first training will begin in July.

## **Department Reports:**

### Governor –

Introduction of Thomas Foley as the new appointee from the Governor's Office.

### State Representative –

Introduction of Joe Hohenstein, representative from the PA House of Representatives. Joe has worn hearing aids for most of his life and has focused on a lot of issues for the disability community while in office. He hosts a disability summit every year. He just cosigned a bill to cover hearing aids and is currently finalizing language before it moves further. There is no bill number yet but he will give the council more information as it becomes available.

### Aging –

Accessible Pharmacy Services Partnership with the PACE Program:

- The PACE Program continues to collaborate with Accessible Pharmacy Services (APS), the national leader in medication management for the blind, low-vision, and DeafBlind communities. PACE and APS are finalizing plans for a pilot initiative focusing on PACE enrollment. The Program has identified 200 people within the enrollment who are blind or visually impaired based on the medications they're taking. This group will receive a letter asking them to participate in the pilot program.

The pilot is being made possible through the collaborative work of several entities, including PACE, Temple University, PA Dept of Health, and APS. Participants will receive free tablet computers through the PA Dept of Health and receive technical assistance and training through Tech Owl, which are students in the Department of Disabilities Studies program at Temple University. APS will then provide medication management and health education at an individual level. Data collected will assist in developing best practices for each group involved in the program.

### State Plan Initiatives:

- Referrals to Hearing/Vision Screenings - The PACE Clearinghouse continues to develop assistance and placement services for the Deaf and Hard of

Hearing individuals through the Clearinghouse. Since January 2023, the Clearinghouse assisted and referred 92 people to vision services and 24 to hearing services.

- PACE Cares Website Redesign - The PACE Program has launched a new website! We worked with the Dept of Aging Communications office and Accessible Pharmacy Services to ensure that accessibility guidelines were reviewed and met, but it continues to be a work in progress.

<https://pacecares.magellanhealth.com/>

## Education –

### New Special Education Grant

- PDE announced in May that \$1.5 million in grant funding was awarded to 15 universities that partner with school districts to expedite the process for students to become a special education teacher. Through the Accelerated Program for PK-12 Special Education Teacher Certification, grants are awarded to colleges and universities with approved PK-12 special education certification programs to partner with at least one school district, approved private school, career and technical center, charter school, cyber charter school, or intermediate unit to provide individuals who currently hold bachelor's degrees with summer field experiences, mentoring by experienced special educators during the school year, and deliver a postbaccalaureate program for PK-12 special education teacher certification within 18 months. This grant program builds on the Department's efforts to recruit and retain teachers in Pennsylvania. PDE's educator workforce strategy works to ensure there is a robust pipeline of educators in place to provide a high-quality education to learners of all ages across the Commonwealth.

## PaTTAN Training Opportunities –

- <http://www.pattan.net/category/Training/Calendar/>

## Health & Human Services –

### Office of Developmental Programs (ODP)

- Announced a 45-day public comment period on ODP's proposal to implement Selective Contracting for Residential and Supports Coordination (SC) services. A concept paper is available if you would like a copy of it. Public comments will be accepted until July 10, 2023.
- Polk State Center closure May 1, 2023

- ODP and the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services have published the latest edition of the [Positive Approaches Journal](#). This edition focuses on addressing stigma associated with mental health and other barriers to mental wellness. Article topics include the importance of peer support and stigma awareness, exploring self-stigma, overcoming stigma through education, mental health stigma across ethnic minority identities, and the importance of community engagement when designing clinical interventions and supports.

#### Office of Long-Term Living

- On March 6, 2023, the Department released a Request for Information to gather input concerning the re-procurement of the Community HealthChoices (CHC) program administered by the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL). It was issued to become aware of stakeholder areas of interest in the current CHC program and opportunities to strengthen it. OLTL is taking all the comments into consideration in the development of the Request for Application (RFA) for the re-procurement. The CHC agreements are set to expire on December 31, 2024.
- The Office of Long-term Living (OLTL) is offering Listen and Learn Sessions with OLTL program participants across Pennsylvania. These sessions are an opportunity for OLTL program participants, family members, and community members to share their feedback on OLTL programs and hear from OLTL staff. A list of sessions by region was provided. Some sessions will be held in person, while others will be held virtually using Microsoft Teams. Remote captioning will be available for the virtual sessions.

#### Newborn Screenings

- Continuing to work with hearing screening providers, hospitals, midwives, and birthing centers to assist them in implementing CMV screenings pursuant to the act that passed last summer.

#### Labor and Industry – Mike Kirby

##### ODHH:

- As of today, there are 611 state-registered interpreters and 41 provisional interpreters. These numbers represent the active number of interpreters across PA who are registered with ODHH. (This number does not represent all interpreters as some are not provisional or state registered). ODHH continues to advocate in ongoing legal, education and medical issues that rise due to failure to accommodate requests for interpreters, other accommodations and general questions and concerns.
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#### OVR:

- The order of selection has been opened for individuals with the most severely disabilities, those with severe disabilities, and those who do not have severe disabilities. Services are continuing to be provided to eligible customers. The pandemic has significantly affected the number of referrals to OVR, but the number of referrals and spending on customer services have returned to pre-pandemic levels, or very close to pre-pandemic levels. Each OVR office continues to implement individual outreach plans to increase their referrals.
- Since July 1, 2022, household income requirements have been temporarily lifted from 300% of the federal poverty guidelines for individuals plus a set amount per dependent to \$100,000 plus a small amount per dependent. Certain limitations on financial assistance for post-secondary training has been lifted. The State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation is expected to approve another temporary extension of the above through June 30, 2024, or earlier, based on the discretion of the OVR Executive Director.
- 25 students have been selected for admission into the 2023 DHH Summer Academy Program that runs on July 16-26, 2023, at Penn State's Main Campus in State College, PA. Two RAs dropped out, but we were able to replace one of the vacancies, so we now have 21 RAs and 2 Resident Directors (RDs). Applicants needed to have any type of hearing loss and have an open OVR case and currently be in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2022-2023 academic year. Applicants who are currently in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade may be considered on a case-by-case basis. If an applicant does not have an open OVR case, they need to go to their local OVR office to refer themselves for services.

#### UC:

- 4.1% unemployment rate in PA in April 2023. There are 83,000 open unemployment insurance claims as of May 27, 2023.

#### Other:

- Have roughly 120 positions throughout the agency that are in various stages of the HR process.
- Recently hired an OVR culture and staff development liaison to work directly with the leadership team on retention, staff development, labor relations and other key projects.
- Currently carrying over funding for a variety of reasons.
- Continuing to review and analyze rates of reimbursement for services to better align with growing rates in the market.
- The board carried the motion to increase the small business start-up maximum cost to \$30,000 per customer. These are customers who have a vocational goal of starting their own business and OVR contributes to their start-up costs. The prior limit was \$10,000. This increase will be through June 30, 2025. The limit is waived entirely for and SSI or SSDI recipient. More information will be forthcoming.

- Last year OVR implemented a rapid engagement for the customers to ensure that customers can apply for services quickly. There is certainly room for improvement, but we have made a lot of progress in this area.
- Summer work programs are starting. This partners students across the state with their local municipalities and local communities to do local community projects. We have 151 locations across the state with 724 students at those locations utilizing 30 providers across 48 counties. Eighteen of those counties are new this year. This is a program that continues to expand, and we are excited to see if continue to grow. Also have Commonwealth internship programs and a DCNR outdoor corps.
- OVR report is finalized and is being made accessible for distribution. Also, have a new newsletter called "the story" that highlights customer successes.
- Hearing Loss Expo is October 11 and 12 with many presentations.

#### Committee Member Reports:

August 7-11 Sertoma is restarting its annual baseball camp for deaf and hard of hearing kids ages 5-18. It is in Mechanicsburg from 9-12. Kids get shirts and hats and on the 11<sup>th</sup>, they go to the Senator game. The Senator players will be coming to camp on Friday morning to hang out with the kids too.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Public Comment Period:**

##### **Old Business:**

##### a. ACDHH Community Needs Survey Update

The survey is still in progress. Currently looking for a survey platform.

##### b. ACDHH Member Recruitment

Vacancy for public member on council. Please tell people and ask them to apply.

##### **New Business:**

Council Nomination Interview with Patrick Kilgallon was conducted with Russ asking the candidate a series of questions. The council went into an executive session to discuss the candidate. The council came back and voted against the candidate moving forward.

Russ brought up developing a code of conduct for the council, like what DHHS uses in their meetings. Janette made a motion to develop a code of conduct. Kalli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Janette will make a draft code of conduct and send to the council for review.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Public Comment Period:**

##### **Other:**

Janette made a motion to close the meeting and motion was seconded by Becky.

Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is on September 15, 2023.

Pennsylvania's Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) was established as a result of Act 1997-37, which required the establishment of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Advisory Council. The Council is mandated to provide recommendations to public and private agencies, advocate for services and act as a bureau of information.