



Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative Bulletin

“Enhancing the effectiveness of disability activism by organizing and empowering individuals, families, groups, and organizations!”

Empowerment! Opportunity! Justice!

December, 2008 - January, 2009

To include information in next month's Bulletin please contact us!

Website: <http://www.ct-dac.org/contactus.htm>

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Holiday Wishes to All!

A slide show featuring activities from the September 27 Disability Convention and Expo is being prepared for our web site. Check us out in a week or two: www.ct-dac.org .

<i>In This Issue</i>	<i>Page</i>
MFP begins!!!	2
Commission on Aging sponsors MFP related event	3
Important AARP and CMS reports that relate to community living	3
New legislative leaders appointed, and other legislative news	5
Needs of aging individuals with developmental disabilities	6
Supportive housing crisis	8
Important legal aid alert & SEIU request	9
Upcoming events & state Education regs on restraint and seclusion	10
2009 Youth Leadership Forum & new pro bono service	11

SNAP/Foods Stamps, Hunger trends, & fuel assistance info	12
Medicare benefit tips, Accessible America competition, & commuter tax benefits	13
Regional Advocacy Networks	14

MFP Begins!

The State's Money Follow the Person program (MFP) is up and running! Eligible persons include anyone who has been in a nursing facility or similar institution for at least six months. Application to the program can be made by calling 1-888-99CTMFP (888-992-8637) or by e-mail mfpc@ct.gov. Additional information may be obtained at www.ct.gov/moneyfollowstheperson.

MFP is designed to revolutionize the way federal Medicaid money is spent in Connecticut, rebalancing expenditures so that individuals needing in-home care can receive that care in their own home rather than in a nursing facility. Here is a brief summary of MFP in bullet form:

- Connecticut has received a five year grant (\$24.2 million) to enable adults who are Medicaid eligible and in a nursing facility – or in another, similar institutional environment - to be eligible for services in the community up to the cost that would be incurred in a nursing facility; as an incentive, the state will receive reimbursement from the federal government of 75% of the cost of in-home support for the first year, substantially above the current 50% reimbursement rate.
- Persons to be served by MFP (700 individuals over 5 years):
 - Elders – 265
 - Individuals with intellectual disabilities – 70
 - “ “ physical disability – 140
 - “ “ brain injury – 35
 - “ “ a mental disability – 140
 - Elders or individuals with physical disabilities at the highest level of need – 50
- In addition to MFP, the state General Assembly has required DSS to submit a plan to the legislature by 1/1/09 (for implementation on 7/1/09) to offer any individual needing long term care (either in a institution or “at risk”) the same menu of MFP service options as is available to those in a nursing facility more than six months. This service has sometimes been referred to as “MFP 2”.
- The legislature also created a "Long-Term Care Reinvestment Account" under MFP. Any funds resulting from the enhanced federal match received by the state under MFP shall be deposited in the account to be used to further enhance community living options for elders and individuals with disabilities.

For more information on MFP contact Dawn Lambert, Project Director, at dawn.lambert@ct.gov or 860-424-4897.

Check out this MFP Related Event!

On Friday, January 9 from 10 am – 12 noon the Connecticut Commission on Aging, in partnership with the Long-Term Care Advisory Council, will present a Legislative Briefing on 1) the results of Connecticut's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment and 2) the above mentioned Money Follows the Person Program. The briefing will be held in the Legislative Office Building, Room 2C (Coffee & tea will be available in the 2nd floor atrium beginning at 9:30 am).

The need to receive or provide long-term services and supports will touch nearly every person in Connecticut at some point during their lives. Speaking at the Briefing will be Julie Robison, PhD, and Noreen Shugrue, JD, MBA, MA, of the University of Connecticut Health Center's Center on Aging, who will present results of the state's comprehensive statewide long-term care needs assessment.

Social Services Commissioner Mike Starkowski will also speak and will present the Money Follows the Person program, which began accepting applications the first week of December.

Interested persons should RSVP via email: coa@cga.ct.gov, or call the Connecticut Commission on Aging: (860) 240-5200.

The Long-Term Care Needs Assessment reports and an executive summary are available on the Connecticut Commission on Aging website at www.cga.ct.gov/coa. For hardcopies contact the Commission on Aging office.

Related AARP Report

Brenda Kelley, state AARP Director, has shared information from a July 2008 national AARP Public Policy Institute report that sheds a light on how Connecticut is using its Medicaid dollars for long term care. Long term care in this instance includes both the cost of care in nursing facilities as well as the cost of funding community support options, which are referred to under Medicaid as Home and Community Based Services, or HCBS. For a copy of the report e-mail Brenda at bkelly@aarp.org.

Medicaid long term care data is typically reported as an aggregate for all populations, including people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, people with physical disabilities, and elders. Because of the infrastructure the state agencies that serve those with developmental disabilities have set up over the last twenty years, a greater percentage of individuals with developmental disabilities have been receiving community support services than other populations. For example, a recent federal review of activity for those states operating a Money Follows the Person program reveals that 48% of individuals that have been transitioned out of

nursing facilities were developmentally disabled, 26% were individuals with physical disabilities, and 21% were elders.

The July 2008 AARP report used 2006 Medicaid data that showed Connecticut spent 27% of Medicaid long term care dollars on community support services for all populations, giving us a national rank of 36. When individuals with developmental disabilities were separated out, the data revealed Connecticut spent 8% of Medicaid LTC dollars for people with physical disabilities and older adults giving us a national rank of 42. Regardless of how you look at the data, we can and must do better. MFP gives us an opportunity to improve our standing.

The AARP report also found that from 2001-2006 the number of people with physical disabilities and older adults receiving community living support in Connecticut increased 24%, compared to a 5% decrease in the number of these populations in nursing facilities. However, the increase in Medicaid spending on nursing homes in Connecticut for people with physical disabilities and older adults was more than 4.5 times the increase in spending on community support services. Spending critical dollars on nursing facility placements is not a wise choice when community living is both desirable and possible.

Other important findings from the AARP study:

- In 2006, only seven states spent 40 percent or more of their Medicaid dollars for older people and adults with physical disabilities on community living support (Alaska, California, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Washington).
- There is great variation among states, ranging from 5 percent or less to more than 50 percent (again, in Connecticut it was 8% giving us a national rank of 42).
- In 22 states, the dollar increase in Medicaid spending on community living support from 2001 to 2006 was greater than the dollar increase in spending on nursing home care. Another 27 states added more Medicaid funds to nursing home services than to community living support during these five years (again, Connecticut added 4.5 times more spending to nursing homes than to community living support).

AARP Connecticut Executive Director Brenda Kelley notes the good work done in Connecticut that has enabled people with intellectual disabilities to successfully live and thrive in the community with strong home and community based supports. “We need to work hard to sustain and build upon these efforts”, Kelley said. “I also believe we need to work hard to ensure that similar opportunities are available to other groups needing long term care. And for all populations, Connecticut is still far behind many other states in using its Medicaid dollars in a way that is sustainable over time, cost effective, and that meets the needs and preferences of people with disabilities.”

Another Related Report

Steve Gold, veteran disability rights advocate, has shared useful information from the 2008 Nursing Home Data Compendium compiled by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The data derives from two sources – the Minimum Data Set (provided quarterly for each

nursing facility resident) and from OSCAR (data collected from CMS's own surveys and certifications). The analysis is broken down in four sections: why are people in facilities, how are people doing in facilities, nursing facility deficiencies, and specific nursing home deficiencies.

Several items in the report are relevant to Connecticut:

- Of the total population of nursing facility residents throughout the country, amazingly enough 29% had no activity of daily living (ADL) impairments, and 8.1% had only one impairment. Connecticut - along with Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Iowa, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Minnesota - had the largest percentage of persons in nursing facilities with only one ADL impairment.
- In the aggregate, 18.3% of all states nursing facilities were cited for failure to treat or prevent pressure sores; in Connecticut, 34.5% of our nursing facilities were so cited. Only Arkansas, Kansas, and Minnesota had a higher percentage.

To view Steve Gold's analysis go to his web site: www.stevegoldada.com and search for Article #260.

New State General Assembly Leaders

The state General Assembly will include the following in leadership positions:

- Rep. Christopher Donovan of Meriden as the House Speaker-elect and Rep. Denise Merrill of Storrs as the new majority leader.
- Donald Williams of Brooklyn will return as President Pro Tempore of the state Senate and Martin Looney of New Haven will return as the Majority Leader.
- Rep. Donovan has announced the House leadership of key General Assembly committees:
 - Select Committee on Aging - Joseph Serra, Chair, Beth Bye, Vice Chair
 - Appropriations Committee - John Geragosian, Chair; Jason Bartlett, Vice Chair; Deborah Heinrich, Vice Chair; Kelvin Roldan, Vice Chair
 - Select Committee on Children - Faith McMahon, Chair, Karen Jarmoc, Vice Chair
 - Education Committee - Andrew Fleischmann, Chair, Tom Reynolds, Vice Chair
 - Select Committee on Housing - Ken Green, Chair; Larry Butler, Vice Chair
 - Human Services Committee - Toni Walker, Chair; Cathy Abercrombie, Vice Chair
 - Judiciary Committee - Michael Lawlor, Chair; Gerry Fox, Vice Chair
 - Program Review & Investigation Committee - Mary Mushinsky, Chair; Diana Urban, Vice Chair
 - Public Health Committee - Betsy Ritter, Chair; Linda Gentile, Vice Chair
 - Public Safety Committee - Steven Dargan, Chair; Ed Jutila, Vice Chair
 - Regulations Review Committee - Christopher Caruso, Ranking Member
 - Transportation Committee - Tony Guerrero, Chair; Thomas Kehoe, Vice Chair; Steve Mikutel, Vice Chair
- On December 18 Senator Williams announced the leadership on the Senate side:

- Aging - Edith Prague, Chair; Thomas Gaffey, Vice Chair
- Appropriations - Toni Harp, Chair; Joan Hartley, Vice Chair
- Children - Anthony Musto, Chair; Edward Meyer, Vice Chair
- Education - Thomas Gaffey, Chair; John Fonfara, Vice Chair
- Housing - Edwin Gomes, Chair; Paul Doyle, Vice Chair
- Human Services - Paul Doyle, Chair; Eric Coleman, Vice Chair
- Judiciary - Andrew McDonald, Chair; Mary Ann Handley, Vice Chair
- Program Review and Investigations - Andrew Maynard: Ranking Member
- Public Health - Jonathan Harris, Chair; Gayle Slossberg, Vice Chair
- Public Safety - Andrea Stillman, Chair; Eileen Daily, Vice Chair
- Regulations Review - Joan Hartley, Chair
- Transportation - Donald Defronzo, Chair; Bob Duff, Vice Chair

How Do I Find My State Representative and Senator?

To find your state representative and state Senator go to the General Assembly's web site (www.cga.ct.gov) and click the House or Senate links (located on the left side of the home page or at the top of a secondary page). Click "Find Your Legislator". Click the district number for your town and you will get to the individual web page of your elected officials. If your city or town has more than one legislative district (more than one representative or senator) you will be directed to a map of your area to determine in which district you live.

P&A to Continue Bill Tracking Service

Beth Leslie, Legislative Liaison for the Office of Protection and Advocacy, has announced she will continue her weekly bill tracking update during the upcoming state legislation session. She will also send out e-mail notices regarding proposed legislation, budget proposals, public hearings and other legislative business affecting people with disabilities. To protect your privacy, Beth sends an e-mail to herself, and puts individual names in the "bcc" or "blind copy" section.

Beth is eager to add anybody with an interest in state legislation to her distribution list. Feel free to contact her at beth.leslie@po.state.ct.us.

Planning for Needs of Aging Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

On Thursday, December 11 the state legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee released its eagerly awaited report on the needs of aging individuals being served by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). The report includes recommendations relating to the DDS Wait and Planning Lists. To get the full report as well as the Findings and Recommendations go to:

[Findings and Recommendations \(.pdf\)](#)

[Findings and Recommendations Key Points \(.pdf\)](#)

Background: in 2004 the Arc of Connecticut and the then Department of Mental Retardation (now the Department of Developmental Services) as well as the Department of Social Services entered into a five-year settlement agreement which resulted in a \$33.8 million in funding to move clients off of the DDS wait list. The end of the wait list funding commitment in 2009 will stop the momentum made and create another wait list backlog, raising the possibility of further litigation.

Proposed recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee include:

- The Waiting List: Funding for the wait list initiative should continue at current level for another five-year period. In addition, a separate, non-lapsing General Fund account should be established to receive any proceeds from the sale, lease, or transfer of any DDS property. The fund must be used to supplement the funding DDS plans to provide for services to individuals on its wait list. Any investment earnings on the fund's balance must be credited to the fund.
- Policies, Procedures, and Services: The DDS policy and procedures manual provides no guidance or directives for what would constitute a change in situation in a client's life that would prompt a new level of need assessment.
 - Older individuals residing in their own or family home with few or no supports and perhaps with an aging caregiver should be monitored on a more frequent schedule. The need for respite services becomes more important as the state continues to implement its policy to serve individuals at home.
 - DDS should increase the minimum frequency of case manager face-to-face contacts for DDS clients residing with aging caregivers as well as for aging individuals receiving DDS case management services in all residential settings.
 - At a minimum, a staff person in each region should be delegated to assist the central office aging coordinator in the efforts to develop new service alternatives and to leverage existing elder programs in order to integrate aging DDS consumers into the community whenever possible.
 - DDS should designate a central office point-of-contact to assist families seeking legal and/or financial guidance regarding planning for the future of their adult sons and daughters.
 - DDS should incorporate an additional component to the individual plan of aging clients that would reflect the individual/family's desired long-term care plan along with alternative contingencies if the desired long-term care plan is not viable.
- Long Term Care in Nursing Homes: Several concerns were raised by advocacy groups regarding the care provided to individuals with intellectual disabilities who reside in nursing homes.
 - The Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities recently identified many areas of concern regarding DDS clients in nursing homes including: infrequent case management contact; lack of notification regarding significant changes in client condition; incomplete medical histories for individuals moving from a community-based setting to a nursing home; and people being placed far away from friends and family.

- The term “significant change in condition” be defined in guidelines, including the process that nursing facilities must follow in notifying DDS, what actions must be taken by DDS upon receipt of such notification, and circumstances that should initiate face-to-face contact between a client and his or her case manager, and/or require an assessment by a DDS nurse consultant. The roles and responsibilities of the case manager supervisor and regional manager-on-call should also be defined, including any actions that must be taken by them when such notification occurs.
- DDS should establish a centralized data system to capture information on clients residing in nursing homes.
- Continued Planning Efforts for the Aging Population: More specific objectives are needed in the agency's overall five-year plan to convey a clear vision or at least an anticipated picture of where the department wants to be in the future with regard to its aging consumers.
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services, in consultation with the Commissioner of Public Works and the Office of Policy and Management, shall evaluate the feasibility and appropriateness of a continuum of options for Southbury Training School. At a minimum, the range of options shall include property closure and sale, continued or modified use as a DDS residential facility, and alternate uses for other state agency services.
 - The DDS commissioner shall hold public hearings to solicit input and opinion of interested stakeholders. The DDS commissioner shall submit a report containing the criteria and standards used to form the basis of the evaluation, transcript of any hearing(s) held, as well as findings and recommendations to the governor and the legislature no later than December 31, 2010.

Cost of Client Care and Planning: A discussion needs to occur around the factors that influence the costs of care delivered in various settings and whether rebalancing the system would allow for more individuals with intellectual disabilities to be served, while still ensuring the health and safety of all individuals receiving DDS services.

- The Department of Developmental Services, in consultation with the Department of Social Services, shall conduct a detailed cost review of per capita, per diem costs of care provided in institutional settings to care provided in the community. The cost methodology should include, but not be limited to the following factors: resident acuity, collective bargaining agreements, Medicaid costs, and the differences in staff costs between public and private providers. The report shall be presented to the legislative committees of cognizance by February 1, 2010.

Take Action Today to Save Supportive Housing

The hard work of advocates at the State Capitol over the last few years has secured state funding to create supportive housing for individuals with mental disabilities. The Keep the Promise Coalition and NAMI/CT have now reported that funding for 150 units of supportive housing is at

risk. The housing projects are “shovel ready” (i.e., ready to be built), but have been put on hold due to the state budget crisis. KTP and NAMI/CT are asking all advocates to call Governor Rell at 860-566-4840 and Secretary Genuario at the Office of Policy and Management (860-418-6500 or by email at robert.genuario@ct.gov) and ask them to allow the housing construction for the third round of Next Steps supportive housing to move forward immediately.

To learn more about this need, visit www.ctreachinghome.org or contact Kate Kelly, Reaching Home Campaign Manager, at 860-244-0066 or kate@ctpartnershiphousing.com.

Action Alert from Legal Services

A funding crisis has already hit the state’s legal aid agencies and your support is needed to keep the three programs alive.

Due to the serious economic issues the country is facing, nearly one-third of the legal services that are provided to Connecticut’s poorest citizens may be wiped out. The primary source of legal aid funding (64%) comes from an account set up through the private bar that is known as IOLTA (Interest On Lawyer Trust Accounts). With the double whammy of our stalled economy and low interest rates, IOLTA has collapsed. The combination has led to a funding gap of \$8-9 million. Up to one third of the legal services staff (fifty employees) may be laid off.

The three state legal aid agencies (i.e., Connecticut Legal Services, New Haven Legal Assistance, and Greater Hartford Legal Aid) are asking all concerned citizens to contact their legislators and tell them not to let that happen. You may also make a donation to the legal aid agencies by contacting New Haven Legal Assistance (203-946-4811), Greater Hartford Legal Aid (860-541-5048), or Connecticut Legal Services (860-344-0447).

Over 25,000 individuals depend on our legal aid agencies for support every year. Don’t let them down.

SEIU Looking for PCA Users

The SEIU (Service Employees International Union) is looking for ways to work with advocates, consumers and workers to improve access to quality home and community based services for seniors and people with disabilities. SEIU has done extensive work in other states to learn and understand the stories of both consumers and supports as it relates to improving access to quality jobs for personal care assistants and improving quality care for consumers.

As they begin their work in Connecticut, they want to hear directly from users of personal assistance services. What are your challenges? What are the benefits? How can waiver programs be improved to help further promote independent living?

Organizer Melissa Pinnick is inviting interested persons to contact her by phone at 410-919-8310 (cell), on her office line (860-251-6076) or through email at melissa.pinnick@seiu.org

Save the Dates!

On Wednesday, January 14, from 9:00 am – 4:30 pm, the Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut Inc. (LDA) will hold their Annual Conference entitled “IDEA and NCLB: What You Don’t Know CAN Hurt You”. The snow date is January 15). The event will be held at the Holiday Inn Hotel, 3580 East Main Street, Waterbury. Wayne Steedman, attorney from Wrightslaw (www.wrightslaw.com/speak/09.01.ct.htm) will speak on IDEA and No Child Left Behind. The program will include tips how to use these laws to get better special education services for children with disabilities. A limited number of scholarships for parents are available. Please contact the LDA for details. (www.ldact.org/) or call 860-560-1711.

A presentation on “Siblings of Children/Teens with ASD” will be held on January 29 from 7:00 – 8:30 pm at the Autism Spectrum Resource Center, 101 North Plains Industrial Road, Wallingford. Julie Wolf, Ph.D. will be the presenter, and topics to be covered include: characteristics of the sibling relationship; the experience of living with a sib with ASD; psychological adjustment of typically developing sibs; sibling issues in adulthood; siblings’ knowledge/understanding of ASD; and meeting the needs of typically developing sibs.

There is no fee to attend but limited space is available – call the ASRC now to reserve a spot: 203-265-7717.

North Star Presents...

Cathy Adamczyk, Coordinator of North Star, has announced an evening workshop for parents entitled “The Importance of Identifying and Developing Areas of Strength for All Students”. Speakers will be Dr. Lesley Hart and Dr. Tina M. Newman from the Yale Academic Skills Clinic at the Yale Child Study Center. The event is set for January 28th from 7:00-9:00 pm. It will be held at the First Congregational Church, 137 Derby Avenue in Derby.

At the Yale Child Study Clinic assessments are focused on academics and the factors that allow students to be successful. The focus is not just on areas of weakness, but also on areas of strength and how best to capitalize on these strengths. Supporting and developing a child's areas of strength gives them confidence and skills that will allow them to be successful in school and beyond.

To ensure enough handouts and refreshments, RSVP to Cathy Adamczyk at: cathya@ntplx.net

State Education Regs Approved

Beth Leslie, legislative liaison for the Office of Protection and Advocacy, reports that the State Board of Education has approved amended regulations governing restraint and seclusion of students in public schools. The revised regulations now proceed to the Attorney General for review. If the Attorney General finds that the regulations are acceptable under the law, then the legislative Regulations Review Committee will decide whether to approve or reject the regulations.

To have Beth send you documents relating to the new regs, e-mail her at beth.leslie@po.state.ct.us.

Helping Young Adults with Disabilities Develop Leadership Skills

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project (CT YLP) empowers youth with disabilities to realize their leadership potential. Every year the Project sponsors a four day, overnight Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) that features self-awareness and team building activities. At YLF young adults explore leadership styles and develop and implement team and personal leadership plans. The 2009 Forum being held July 26–29 at the University of Connecticut.

Delegates to YLF are chosen through a statewide application process that seeks out students with disabilities who have leadership potential. Each applicant submits a standard application form, an essay, and a letter of recommendation. Application forms are available at all Connecticut high schools. The application is followed up with an interview. The combined score determines who is selected for the Forum. YLF seeks to select students who are representative of the state of Connecticut in terms of geography, gender, economic status, ethnicity and types of disabilities.

To find out more about the Connecticut Youth Project and the Youth Leadership Forum go to www.ctylp.org. Final application deadline is January 16, 2009.

The FPA CT Pro Bono Network

State Treasurer Denise Nappier has announced she has joined forces with the Financial Planning Associations (FPA) of Connecticut to develop the CT Pro Bono Network, which will provide a free half hour consultation with a certified financial planner to individuals who seek advice on issues such as how to juggle saving for retirement and college while paying off a mortgage or car loan.

The Financial Planning Association of Connecticut serves the Connecticut Valley, Fairfield County and Greater New Haven areas with 50 members participating in the Network. Individuals interested in speaking with one of the Association's certified financial planners can call 860-721-PLAN (7526) or toll free 1-800-490-4237. A planner will evaluate the caller's specific financial concerns and assist them in identifying solutions to achieve financial growth and stability as their life circumstances change.

Primary funding support for the Pro Bono Network counseling service has been provided by Bank of America with additional resource assistance from the National Foundation for Financial Planning, Chapter Grant program.

New SNAP (Food Stamp) Telephone Info Line

As of December 1, people interested in learning about SNAP (formerly the food stamp program) can access basic information via a new toll-free telephone line. Created and managed by End Hunger CT!, callers can hear about income and asset requirements, get contact numbers of outreach workers, and request an application be mailed to them. The automated line is toll-free and provides information in both English and Spanish. Funded through an outreach grant from the Connecticut Department of Social Services and the USDA, the SNAP information line joins the End Hunger CT!'s on-line pre-screener in providing immediate access to food stamp information.

Persons interested in SNAP can call 1-866-974-SNAP twenty-four hours a day or access the on-line pre-screener at www.ctfoodstamps.org.

Report on Connecticut Hunger Trends

A recent report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) on hunger and poverty in Connecticut shows that many state residents are slipping through the cracks in federal and state nutrition programs. The State of the States report shows that between 2005 and 2007, on average 122,000 people in Connecticut lived in households that struggled against hunger and that 7.9 % of Connecticut residents live in poverty, with 11.1% of the state's children being impoverished. The report also indicates only 62% of eligible individuals participate in the SNAP/ Food Stamp program.

FRAC and End Hunger Connecticut! pledge to work with the incoming Obama administration to accomplish the goal of ending childhood hunger in the United States by 2015. They are pushing for Congress to take immediate action to increase SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. To view the FRAC report, go to http://frac.org/pdf/SOS_2008_withcover_nov08.pdf.

Fuel Assistance Information Available Through 2-1-1

Thousands of Connecticut households have been approved for home heating assistance this winter and thousands more applications are being processed. The state Department of Social Services, which administers the state's two primary low-income heating assistance programs – Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) and the Connecticut Heating Assistance Program (CHAP) – began taking applications in mid-August. Since then, DSS reports that nearly 67,000 households have applied; more than 47,000 have been accepted and the number of applications is a 20 percent increase for the same period in 2006, the last time DSS opened the application process in August.

In addition, nearly 600 moderate-income household are currently being served by the non-profit Operation Fuel. Under an emergency heating aid plan the legislature approved in August, Operation Fuel received \$14 million in state aid to assist senior citizens and households that do not qualify for CEAP or CHAP.

Information on all the programs is available by calling 2-1-1 – the statewide information helpline. A comprehensive energy aid Web site can be found by clicking on the “CT Energy Resources” link on the State of Connecticut Web site at www.ct.gov.

Families, individuals with disabilities, and senior citizens should apply as soon as possible so that their winter needs can be met promptly.

Medicare Drug Option can be Costly: Tips for Choosing Wisely

Medicare's prescription drug benefit is designed to help older Americans reduce their spending on medications. The Wall Street Journal reports that the program's complex structure and varied options can lead to costly mistakes. Anticipating that the most popular Medicare drug plans are raising premiums in 2009, the WSJ article includes six tips from health-policy analysts and advocates for ways to choose a drug plan that is most advantageous.

To review the article go to: www.globalaging.org/health/us/2008/benefit.htm

Accessible America Competition

The National Organization on Disability has announced its annual \$25,000 award competition that is open to all cities and towns across the nation. The purpose of the competition is to recognize and promote replication of exemplary practices that communities use to facilitate the comprehensive involvement of citizens with disabilities in community life. To see the guide lines and instructions go to: http://www.nod.org/Resources/PDFs/accamer09_guidelines.pdf. The application deadline is December 31.

Commuter Tax Benefit Brings Down the Cost of Commuting

Connecticut employees with and without disabilities may be able to benefit from the state's Commuter Tax Benefit program, which allows employees to set aside pre-tax income to pay for transit and vanpool fares. Not only does the program encourage a more environmentally friendly way to commute, it helps reduce the overall cost of commuting, no matter what happens to gas prices. The program is offered as a commuter service of the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

Employees may set aside up to \$120 a month of their salaries before taxes to pay for transit and vanpool fares. An employee may also set aside up to \$230 a month to pay for qualified parking expenses. Qualified parking is parking at or near an employer's worksite, or at a facility from which an employee commutes via transit, vanpool or carpool.

Commuter tax benefits are like money in the bank. Employers save on payroll related taxes and employees save on federal and Connecticut state income taxes. The Commuter Tax benefit is available only through an employer-sponsored commuter benefit program.

To take advantage of Connecticut's Commuter Tax Benefit program, contact the Human Resources Department where you work or contact www.commutertaxbenefit.org.

Disability Advocacy Collaborative Regional Contacts

To get involved with one of the Collaborative's Regional Advocacy Networks, contact the following:

Northwest -- contact: Bill Knight (lackerman01@snet.net) – meetings are held at the Litchfield Arc

Southwest –contact: Carol Kana (pkana@snet.net) – meetings are held at the Norwalk Police Department

Danbury Area – contact Dale Brown (dbrown@wecahr.org) – meetings are held at Ability Beyond Disability in Bethel

North Central — contact: Candace Low (clow@independenceunlimited.org) – meetings are held at 151 New Park Avenue in Hartford

Waterbury Area –contact: Mike Valuckas (mike.valuckas@independencenorthwest.org) – contact Mike for information about next meeting

Northeast Area – contact: Carolyn Newcombe (cnewcombe@charter.net) – meetings are held at the Mansfield Senior Center

Bridgeport Area – contact: Tony LaCava (tlacava@drcfc.org) – meetings are on the third Thursday of the month at various sites.

For three years the Bulletin was supported by a grant that the Disability Advocacy Collaborative has received from the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities. In addition, in-kind support is being provided by the UCONN Center on Disabilities, and Communitas, Inc. serves as the project's fiscal agent. To all three we extend our deep appreciation.