

Brain injury program to ensure greater access to community-based services*

By Ben Woodworth, Brain Injury Program manager, Iowa Department of Public Health

More than 2,200 Iowans each year experience a traumatic brain injury that requires hospitalization. Of those, more than 750 will experience long-term disability as a result. According to a 2000 CDC report, there are an estimated 50,000 such individuals living in Iowa – a number similar to the population of Ames.

As part of an enterprise-wide effort to ensure that all Iowans, including those with brain injuries, have access to quality healthcare, Governor Tom Vilsack signed the Brain Injury Services program bill on May 23. The bill will allow the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) to implement a one-of-a-kind program to help those with brain injuries and their families in navigating and maximizing the Iowa community-based service system.

Passage of the bill was the result of efforts from Iowans with brain injuries, their families, the Advisory Council on Brain Injuries, the Brain Injury Association of Iowa and key legislators. State representatives Danny Carroll and Jim Kurtenbach co-sponsored the legislation, working closely with survivors and families to create a program that addresses identified service gaps in Iowa.

Specifically, the bill provides funding for Iowans on the waiting list for the Medicaid Home and Community Services Brain Injury (BI) Waiver, as well as funding for services on a cost-share basis for those who have been denied BI Waiver funding.

The BI Waiver currently serves about 660 Iowans. Although many Iowans experiencing brain injury have private insurance, few insurers cover necessary services after hospitalization for these people to return to their community, home and employment.

“We (Iowa families) have a brain injury waiver, but very often people are on the waiting list for that waiver for many months,” said Kay Graber chair of Iowa’s Advisory Council on Brain Injuries. “We desperately need continuity of services from the hospital setting to community-based services and this program helps to bridge that gap.”

The bill also provides funding for a Resource Facilitation system. This system will offer support to those with a brain injury and their families to cope with lifestyle changes and the transition back to work and the community. It is intended to provide on-going support for consumers and their families by:



Gov. Tom Vilsack signs the Brain Injury Services program bill designed to help those with brain injuries and their families make the most of the community-based service system. He is joined by (l-r) Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson, Rep. Danny Carroll, Rep. Jim Kurtenbach, and Sen. Daryl Beall.

- Providing brain injury specific information, support and resources;
- Enhancing natural supports and linking to appropriate services and community resources;
- Training service providers to provide appropriate brain injury services; and
- Accessing, securing and maximizing funding, both private and public.

As the lead government agency for brain injury, IDPH will act as fiscal agent and contract administrator and provide program oversight. The appropriation of funds for the 2007 fiscal year is \$2.4 million. Access will be based on the dollars available; it is not an entitlement program. The Advisory Council on Brain Injuries will be responsible for oversight of this program and will ensure that the program will recognize and respect the unique needs of each individual with brain injury and his or her family.

** From the July 2006 issue of the Iowa Health FOCUS Newsletter, published by the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and available at www.idph.state.ia.us/do/focus.asp.*



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