

Brain Injury Services in North Dakota

Introduction

The state of North Dakota is unable to determine an accurate number of people with brain injury. In June, 2016, a needs assessment was completed for the ND Department of Human Services Behavioral Health Division which identified limited services and supports for the individuals with brain injury. This means people need to depend on their families regarding medical, insurance and work issues.

- **Brain injuries in the state of North Dakota** are not accurately documented. Brain injury is defined as an injury to the brain, which occurs after birth and is acquired through traumatic or non-traumatic insults.
- **Diagnosing brain injuries is costly and often overlooked which is a significant barrier to receiving services.** A person that arrives at the emergency room following an accident is not examined for a head injury unless there are visible signs of trauma to the head. This may result in further emergency room visits, doctors' appointments, loss of work and personal frustration.
- **Insurance coverage is limited following a brain injury.** Without the proper diagnosis, people might not receive the needed testing, therapy and medication, which often causes an increase in insurance denials. Many lose jobs due to the brain injury, resulting in loss of insurance or WSI coverage.
- **Education about brain injury.** People with brain injury feel frustrated with service providers, medical personnel and community agency staff regarding understanding and treatment.

In the 2015 legislative session, the House reenacted sections of the ND Century Code relating to the definition of brain injury, and to provide for a legislative management study. Services for people with brain injury continue to be few, are disparate and disjointed.

Recommendations

The state of ND needs to implement legislation to assist in providing services and medical care to people who are struggling with brain injury. People with brain injury need to be seen as a priority in receiving testing, medical care and therapy to cope with this "hidden condition". Their conditions go undiagnosed causing frustration, family's loss, job loss and financial strain.

The process for providing services following a brain injury are limited in meeting the needs of the person with the brain injury, family, employers and the community. Increased education and services to assist in understanding a brain injury are desperately needed.

Services fall into the Intellectual/Developmental Disability discipline and do not fit the scope of care for someone with a brain injury. There needs to be a specific protocol starting with diagnosis and following a continuum of care.

Resources

NDDHS Behavioral Health Division, 2016. ND Brain Injury Needs Assessment: Final Report. Available at www.ndbin.org/pdf/2016-nd-brain-injury-need-assessment

ND Brain Injury Network, 2016. Available at www.ndbin.org

ND 65th Legislative Assembly, 2017. Available at www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/65-2017

