

2025 TAI Speaker Bios:

Session 1: Administration on Disabilities, Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Federal Updates

Speaker: Mary Lazare

Mary Lazare was sworn in as ACL's principal deputy administrator on March 3, 2025, returning to the role she held from 2017-2021.

Throughout a career focused on improving the health and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults, Mary has led social services and health care systems in building partnerships across industries and all levels of government, modernizing system infrastructure and leveraging new technology, and creating opportunities for innovation in order to better meet the needs of the people they serve.

During her prior tenure at ACL, Mary led the agency's overall day-to-day operations and spearheaded several key initiatives, including an interagency task force focused on expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities; a public-private partnership to prevent social isolation; and cross-sector collaboration to align health care and aging and disability services to improve health outcomes and reduce costs.

Before joining ACL, she served as Vice President for Home and Community-Based Services for Lutheran Senior Services, overseeing the operations of home health, hospice, and private duty services to improve patient outcomes and developed partnerships among aging services, health care systems and providers to better meet the individual needs of older adults. In earlier roles, she served as Vice President of Senior Care Facilities and Community Health Ministries at Ascension Health, Vice-President of Senior Services and Home Care Services at BJC Health Care, and Executive Director for the Jewish Center for the Aged. She also has served on the board of the Mid-East Area Agency on Aging Foundation of St Louis, the Continuum of Care Committee of the Catholic Health Association, the American Hospital Association Governing Council for Post-Acute Care Services, and a number of other civic and professional organizations.

Mary received her undergraduate degree from the University of Missouri, a master's degree in gerontology from Lindenwood University, and a Master of Business Administration and Management from Maryville University of Saint Louis.

Speaker: Dr. Jennifer Johnson

Jennifer G. Johnson, Ed. D., Acting Commissioner of the Administration on Disabilities, provides overall leadership of AoD's programs and initiatives focused on direct services, research, capacity-building, and system change that are improving the quality of community living. In her role, she oversees disability programs that are working to create change and improve the lives of the estimated 61 million people with disabilities living in the United States by advancing opportunities for inclusion and participation in the community, employment and financial well-being, independence and self-determination.

As a person with disabilities and a parent of children with disabilities, she has a deep commitment to improving opportunities for disabled people to lead full lives in the community. During her 30-plus year career in government, academia, national organizations, and local school systems, she has worked on a wide variety of issues to advance the meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities. She leads AoD's work on health equity, including I/DD Counts, an interagency initiative led by ACL to improve the availability of health and prevalence data on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Jennifer holds a doctorate in special education from The George Washington University.

Speaker: David Jones

David Jones currently serves as the Director of the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities within the Administration for Community Living (ACL) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to joining ACL, David served in two federal agencies focused on disability employment. At the U.S. Department of Labor, David oversaw the administration of Disability Employment Initiative grants and technical assistance contracts to help strengthen the capacity of American Job Centers serve people with disabilities. At the U.S. Department of Education, David monitored state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies and was a Program Officer for two Protection and Advocacy programs (PAIR and PAAT). Prior to his career focus on the disability inclusion work, David served within the Inspector General (IG) community for three federal agencies and the United Way of America. Originally from Pennsylvania, David holds a Bachelor's Degree from Bucknell University and a Masters of Public Administration from George Mason University.

Speaker: Sara Newell-Perez

Sara Newell-Perez serves as a Program Lead for the Administration on Disabilities, Administration for Community Living within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), where she has provided federal monitoring of State Councils on Developmental Disabilities formula grants since 2006. In her role as Contracting Officer Representative (COR), Sara oversees the NACDD Training and Technical Assistance Contract (ITACC), and the Program Information Resources Management (PIRM) contract, which provides statistical support for the Administration on Disabilities (AoD) program data. Prior to joining federal service, Sara worked for the Arc New York and as a disability advocate in Washington DC. Sara is a graduate of the State University of New York at Albany.

Speaker: Jack Brandt

Jack Brandt currently serves as the Program Specialist in the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities within the Administration for Community Living (ACL) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to joining ACL, he served as a Disability Policy Specialist for the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University from 2010 to 2021. At the Partnership, Mr. Brandt worked on various projects related to disability leadership and coordinated the Undergraduate Disability Studies program. Mr. Brandt was a Disability Rights Advocate at the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy from 2008 to 2010. He was also a Virginia Governor's Fellow at the Office of Community Integration for People with Disabilities in 2006. Mr. Brandt was appointed as a member of the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities in 2010 and was later appointed Chairman in 2016. He has received the Jackie Crews award from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, the National Advocacy Award from the Arc of the United States, the Colorado Award from the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and the Young Professional Award from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. Mr. Brandt received a B.A. from James Madison University and an M.S. from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Session 2: Supporting Healthy Communities: Positive Impacts and Approaches

Speaker: Snohomish County Public Health Team

Kari Bray:

Kari Bray is the Communication Director for the Snohomish County Executive Office. She was the Communications Supervisor at County Health Department at the time of the

project we're presenting. Kari received a degree in Journalism from the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University and worked for nearly a decade in print journalism at daily newspapers before joining Snohomish County's public health team in 2018.

Nicole Thomsen:

Nicole Thomsen is the Public Affairs & Policy Manager with the Snohomish County Health Department. Included in her scope is planning, grants, governmental affairs, policy, partnerships, equity, and until recently, communications. She received her degree from the University of Washington and extends her passion for public health, equity, and policy as a member of the City of Mukilteo Planning Commission and as Health Chair of the NAACP Snohomish County chapter.

Sacha Coughran:

Sacha Coughran is an experienced graphic designer who currently serves the Health Department by developing print and online materials to inform and educate the public. She is a certified Health Literacy Specialist through a program administered by the Institute for Healthcare Advancement. Her favorite aspect of working in the public sector is its applicability to all audiences, and she strives to create designs that are inclusive, relatable, understandable, and actionable.

Todd Holloway:

Todd Holloway is a Senior Independent Living Advocate for the Center for Independence in Lakewood. He works at the local, state, federal, and international levels on Inclusive Emergency Management. Prior to his 10 plus years at CFI, he worked in hospitals doing biomedical photography and videography. He was the media specialist in the education department at Good Samaritan Hospital, where he met the staff and the first director of CFI which was then located on the campus of Good Samaritan. He has never been more comfortable in any position than the one he is in now with CFI.

Helen Wong:

Helen Wong (she/her) is the Health Equity Policy Analyst with the Snohomish County Health Department. Previously, Helen worked many years in non-profit leadership and as an equity organizational change consultant. She is working to support the internal and external equity goals, objectives, strategies of the health department.

Speaker: Kevin Vargas

Kevin Vargas joined the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council as the Contracts and State Plan Coordinator in November 2023. He oversees contract development and management to support the council's initiatives, ensuring alignment with strategic goals and compliance with regulations. Kevin collaborates with stakeholders to secure necessary resources and is instrumental in developing and implementing The Council's state plan. Additionally, he manages federal reporting, including Program Performance Reports and updates to Annual Work Plans.

Speaker: Brandi Monts

Brandi Monts has been with the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council as the Executive Director since September 2022. She actually worked for the DDC in the 90's as councilmember support staff while she was in college and loves continuing to serve and grow at the Council in this current role. Brandi's uncle, Tom, was mainly raised in an institution in Montana, where her family is from. Tom has had a huge impact on how Brandi considers the disabilities movement and her opportunities to help strengthen it. Prior to coming to the Council in 2022, Brandi worked in various positions in the Developmental Disabilities field, including residential services, supported employment, transition from school to work, teaching, county government and consulting.

Speaker: Liz Candelario

Liz M. Candelario began working with the CEDD (DD Council in Puerto Rico) as the lead planner and is now the Executive Director of the CEDD. She is successfully leading the Council to be fully operational, attaining new credibility within the Territory, and being fully successful under the requirements of the federal DD Act.

Speaker: Alexandra Mojica

Alexandra M. Mojica is the Senior Attorney on Staff with the CEDD. When first working on staff, she was the lead on the Council's public policy and advocacy efforts. She is now leading the Council's planning and results oriented operations.

Speaker: Christy Ashley

With over two decades of experience in both facility-based and community mental health and intellectual/developmental disability (IDD) services, Christy brings a wealth of expertise to her current role as Executive Director of the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities. Her career began in 2000 at Hudspeth Regional Center, an ICF/IDD facility, where she worked in Diagnostics and Evaluations. She later transitioned to the Mississippi Department of Mental Health's Central Office, where she represented Professional Development and Clinical Services on various task forces and committees. In this role, she also served as a liaison between state and federal authorities, ensuring training approvals for all credentialed DMH staff.

Currently, she is completing supervision for her licensed clinical social work (LCSW) and provides consultation to clients and families at a local private hospital. Her comprehensive experience and dedication continue to support improving the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, and others across Mississippi.

Speaker: Dr. Berens

Dr. John Berens is an assistant professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and is board certified in both Internal Medicine and Pediatrics. Since completing residency, he has worked as a primary care physician in the Transition Medicine Clinic, which serves adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. His special interests include health care transition, interprofessional education, and addressing health disparities experienced by individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. In addition to his clinical work, he has led several grant-sponsored projects on related topics. He lives in Sugar Land, Texas, with his wife and three children.

Session 3: Adopting Innovative Practices for Recruiting Prospective Members

Speaker: Ebony Haven

Ebony Haven serves as the Executive Director of the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council (LaDDC), bringing nearly seven years of dedicated service to the organization and over a decade of experience in the disability services field. She assumed the role of Executive Director in April 2024, following a year as Interim Director and three years as Deputy Director.

Ebony began her journey with LaDDC in 2018 as a Program Monitor, where she collaborated closely with the Council's grassroots advocacy network and regional resource centers across Louisiana. In this role, she championed initiatives to support individuals

with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families, working to strengthen the systems that serve them.

Before joining LaDDC, Ebony spent over six years in case management and support coordination. She worked directly with individuals with I/DD and their families, gaining firsthand insight into both the services available and the persistent barriers within the system. Her experiences as a support coordinator and later as a supervisor informed her passion for systemic advocacy and reinforced her commitment to improving quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Through her leadership at LaDDC, Ebony continues to drive innovative policies and programs that promote independence, self-determination, and full community inclusion for people with I/DD. Her work focuses on eliminating barriers and creating new pathways to ensure individuals can live, work, and thrive in the communities of their choice.

Speaker: Stefanie Lancaster

Stefanie Lancaster currently serves as the Social Services Administrator of the Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC). Stefanie has been with the Council for 14 years. Over the past 14 years, Stefanie has served in the following roles: Fiscal, Administrative and now serves in the capacity of overseeing all of the Council's contracts. Her passion for the disability community stems from her own disability as a traumatic brain injury survivor. Her passion for helping others is expressed in the work she does.

She currently resides in Dover, DE with her husband, son, and daughter.

Speaker: Lillian DeJean

Lillian DeJean (they/them) is from Broussard, LA and currently serves as the Louisiana Youth Leadership Forum Coordinator (LAYLF.) Lillian was the youngest DD Council member in the country, being appointed to a four-year term at age 15, where they helped create LAYLF by chairing the Ad-Hoc Committee dedicated to initial planning and development. Prior to taking on the role of LAYLF Coordinator in 2023, they served as the Senior Coordinator at the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs, tracking legislation, advising on voting accessibility issues, and providing analysis on disability-related legislation to internal and external policy teams. In their free time, Lillian enjoys reading, crocheting, buying too many houseplants, and frequenting local coffee shops.

Speaker: Matt Kaslon

Matthew (Matt) Kaslon is currently the Vice Chair for the Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCDD). Matt is a passionate self-advocate who experiences autism spectrum disorder and an intellectual disability. Matt has been involved in advocacy efforts for over 13 years. Matt's journey in disability advocacy started with his service with the Nebraska Youth Leadership Council. Governor Ricketts appointed Matt to NCDD in November 2019, and he is serving his final term through October 2025. Matt serves on some of the Nebraska Olmstead Plan's Workgroups, including the Housing Workgroup, Data Workgroup, and Employment/Education Workgroup. He was recently selected to serve on Liberty Healthcare's statewide Human and Legal Rights Advisory Committee (HLRAC). Matt is also a member of the Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council (NSRC).

Speaker: Cordairo Booker

Cordairo Booker is a dedicated advocate for individuals with disabilities. Hailing from Monroeville, Alabama, Cordairo faced a life-altering ATV accident over two decades ago that resulted in paralysis from the waist down. Despite significant physical and mental challenges, he remained determined to live independently and pursue his goals. He graduated from Jefferson Davis High School in 2006.

In 2013, Cordairo was recommended by Kent Crenshaw of Independent Rights and Resources to join the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities (ACDD). Since joining the Council, he has actively contributed to various committees, including the Public Policy Committee and the Planning and Programming Committee. In 2017 he was elected to the Executive Committee and appointed Vice Chair of the Public Policy Committee. Cordairo was elected Chair of the Public Policy Committee in 2022, a role he held until the conclusion of his term in 2023.

Speaker: Lisa Newbern

Lisa Newbern serves as Chair of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities. In this role, she works closely with Council members, employees, and DD Network partners to promote systems change, capacity building and self-advocacy. Lisa also leads Executive Committee and Council meetings, advocates on behalf of Georgians who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and assists whenever and however else needed. GCDD's collaborative work is helping Georgians who have I/DD live, learn, work, lead, play

and worship in their communities. In her professional role, Lisa is the Assistant Center Director for Communications at the Emory National Primate Research Center (NPRC). She provides strategic counsel, develops plans and leads teams in executing communication programs that include executive messaging, issues and risk management, media relations, internal communication, community, educational and collaborative outreach, social media, government relations and more. She also leads the collaborative public relations initiatives for the seven NPRCs, including NPRC.org and @NPRCnews.

Session 4: Positive Practices When Using Social Media

Speaker: Michael Winn, President & CEO of RBOA + Digital Opps

Michael Winn is President and CEO at RBOA, a digitally driven marketing agency based in Tallahassee, Florida for 38 years. He is responsible for analyzing and maximizing all digital media campaigns, corporate marketing objectives, and organizational branding initiatives for clients. Michael ensures that all current technologies, digital web design methodologies, and search engine optimization strategies are leveraged to provide the highest level of success for more than 225 client websites built exclusively on WordPress.

Prior to joining RBOA, Michael was Owner and Senior Web Strategist at Catalyst Consultant Group, a Tallahassee-based digital media consulting firm that worked with clients such as The Proctor Automotive Group, Florida Commerce Credit Union, Lawton Chiles Foundation, American Advertising Federation Tallahassee, Lively Technical Center and the Florida Redevelopment Association. His consulting services included regional and statewide Web-based marketing promotions, integrated database social media campaigns and search engine optimization strategies.

Michael's senior-level management consulting experience with commercial brands such as Acura, Honda, General Motors and non-profit organizations like the United Way and the American Cancer Society serve as the foundation of his knowledge and expertise in maximizing complex digital campaigns.

Michael is an active member of the American Advertising Federation and has served on the board of directors and as President of the Tallahassee chapter.

Michael attended The University of Houston in pursuit of a Bachelor's degree in Business Development and has more than 25 years of experience in staff management, public relations, business development, and integrated digital marketing. He is certified in Google AdWords.

Michael produces a [daily podcast](#) on digital and social media marketing strategies and tactics to help grow a business and is currently ranked in the top 5 on Spotify in the digital marketing podcast category.

Speaker: Jolene Sharp

Jolene Sharp is Chief Strategy Officer for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, where she oversees leadership development, public policy, and communications work. Jolene's professional background is in communications, with a decade of prior experience in the healthcare sector. She holds a B.A. in editorial print journalism. Jolene is passionate about creating change through human connection. She has been married to her high school sweetheart for 23 years and is mom to two pretty awesome kids with disabilities. In her spare time, you'll find her running (very slowly) in the neighborhood with her dog, gardening and watching birds in her backyard, knitting, baking, reading with a great cup of coffee, or traveling to new corners of the globe.

Session 5: 5-Year Plan Development: Positive Practices for Facilitating Strategic Planning Meeting(s) with the Council

Speaker: Mary Willard

Mary Willard is the Operations Director for NACDD. She has 18 years' experience in the disability space, including grassroots Independent Living experience and experience as a National Training and Technical Assistance provider for Rural Independent Living. She received her Masters of Social Work from the University of MT in 2014 and has worked for the University of MT UCEDD, volunteered with several Youth Leadership Forums across the country, and worked with students in middle schools as a Social Work License Candidate therapist. She has led state planning for the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council as the past chair, facilitated peer support groups for people with disabilities and their families, and spent 10 years teaching advocacy skills throughout western Montana high schools to students with disabilities. Before coming to NACDD, Mary enjoyed facilitating strategic planning sessions for non-profits, team building exercises, and participatory evaluation as a private consultant. She is on the board of directors of the Disability Empower Network, the Disability Advisory board for Centene Managed Care, and previously sat on the board of directors for the parent training information (PTI) center in Montana. Mary is a mom of two and loves spending time in the MT outdoors.

Session 6: 5-Year Plan Development: Positive Practices for Decision Making Goal/Objective Framework

Speaker: Michelle Mitchell, MSocSc

Michelle Mitchell is the Executive Director of Partnerships For Health. Her career in public health and evaluation began while working in the rural HIV/AIDS-related clinical trial setting in South Africa. Since then, she has served as the principal investigator for evaluations that range from formative research on informed consent among vulnerable populations, to efficacy of statewide program interventions. Michelle has presented at national conferences on the results of PFH's evaluation findings. She has worked with local community organizations, statewide agencies, legislators, health systems, and federal offices to share evaluation results far and wide. She has been supporting Councils since 2022 with evaluation technical assistance and training through the Building Utilization-Focused Developmental Disabilities Impact Evaluation Skills (BUDDIES) Project.

Speaker: Michelle Munsey, MA

Michelle Munsey is the Assistant Director at Partnerships For Health. She holds a Master's Degree in international development, with concentrations in Program Management and Evaluation. Since joining the PFH team, Michelle has lead formative, process, and outcome evaluation projects that have helped her gain content expertise in performance measures monitoring and tracking systems, community-based evaluation methods, partner engagement, and strategic planning. Michelle has been working with Councils since 2022 through the Building Utilization-Focused Developmental Disabilities Impact Evaluation Skills (BUDDIES) Project, which provides evaluation technical assistance and training to support Council activities.

Speaker: Brooke Lovelace

Brooke Lovelace has been the Executive Director of the Iowa Developmental Disability Council since July 2018. Previously, Lovelace was with the Center for Disabilities and Development, Iowa's Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, where she was the program Coordinator of Iowa's Money Follows the Person Program. Lovelace was with CDD for 15 years and has more than 25 years of experience developing, implementing, managing and leading programs and systems change activities that promote independent and self-determined lives for Iowan's with disabilities.

Lovelace graduated with a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Administration from Drake University and a Bachelor of Science in Sociology from Iowa State. She also completed the Association of University Centers on Disability National Leadership Consortium Institute on Developmental Disabilities.

Speaker: Fanta Mitchell

Fanta Mitchell currently serves as the Office Manager and Membership Coordinator for the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities. In this role, she works closely with council members and staff supporting them in day-to-day operations and any council needs. With a bachelor's degree in International Affairs and Global Health, Fanta's passionate about creating meaningful change in her community. She has worked in the public sector for the past 5 years starting with a local non-profit organization. Outside of work, she enjoys trying new foods, exploring various hiking trails, and reading a good book.

Speaker: Vanessa Blais

Vanessa Blais serves as the director of policy and planning for the NH Council on the Developmental Disabilities. She became interested in disability justice during her 15 years working in supportive education with students from the ages of 3 to 21. She is a Plain Language expert, most recently focused on Plain Language in Law and Civic Policy. She is the Chair of the Manchester City Library Board of Trustees where she works to promote and protect what she believes is the most important democratic institution in our country. She is one of the founders of the Manchester Housing Alliance and Manchester Housing Alliance Land Trust and proud to serve as selectmen for her Manchester NH Ward 4 neighbors, working with her team to ensure that everyone in her ward has the opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

Speaker: Daintry Bartoldus

Daintry Bartoldus, MSW, PhD

Executive Administrator, Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities

Daintry Bartoldus serves as the Executive Administrator of the Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities. With over two decades of leadership in disability rights, public health, and systems transformation, she is deeply committed to building inclusive communities across the state. Daintry leads statewide initiatives that elevate self-advocate

voices, bridge partnerships between the aging and disability networks, and embed cultural relevance into strategic planning. Her work has been instrumental in strengthening cross-sector collaboration, advancing ABLE Savings education, and incorporating real-life stories into policy and program goals. She brings to this session a passion for people-centered planning rooted in Hawai'i's values of inclusion, kuleana, and aloha.

TAI Planning Committee Members (not provided elsewhere):

Luz Collazo has more than 20 years of professional experience. She has served, supported, and advocated for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the community. Luz co-leads the DC Supporting Family Community of Practice as a staff member of the District of Columbia Developmental Disabilities Council. She works closely with agencies and organizations to promote practices that encourage cultural diversity and linguistics competence for the inclusion of people with disabilities and seniors in the District of Columbia. Luz has previously worked at the Independent Living Center and the Puerto Rico DD Council. She has master's and doctoral degrees in industrial and organizational psychology.

Luz is the sibling of a person with a developmental disability. She believes that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to speak for themselves and decide how they want to live in an inclusive community.

Carol Ann Tudor has been employed with the Commonwealth of Kentucky since 1996. She began her position with the Kentucky council in 2005. She is the first person council members interact with when appointed. She is staff to 3 committees on the council and provides administrative support to all staff. Carol Ann is the longest serving employee of the Council and hopes to have a conference room named after her when she retires.

Mitchel Griffin. As the Data Integration Specialist for the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD), Mitchel leads efforts to unify and streamline data systems that support advocacy, policy development, and program evaluation. He works to ensure data accuracy, accessibility, and interoperability, enabling TCDD to make informed, impactful decisions. Mitchel's role bridges technical expertise with a commitment to equity and inclusion, helping to advance the Council's mission of creating a more inclusive Texas.

Katie Arbaugh is the Program Operations Coordinator for the West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council. Before her 3 years with the Council, she has worked as a direct support professional, special education teacher, early interventionist, and is a graduate of Partners in Policymaking. Katie is also the parent of a daughter with Spina Bifida, which supports her work in disability policy and advocacy. She lives on a small farm with her husband and two daughters.