

## Meeting Minutes #12 – Ohio The Health Collaborative Disaster Health Equity Task Force

**Date:** March 11, 2025

**Time:** 1:30 pm EST

**Location:** Zoom

### Meeting Facilitators:

- Christina Alfaro
- Dee Grimm
- Nicole Volpenhein
- Jessica Skelton

## Executive Summary:

- Highlighted persistent communication barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, including lack of provider knowledge about accessibility needs, technology access issues (particularly for elderly), and language/format barriers for non-English speakers.
- Discussion revealed systemic biases in healthcare and employment, emphasizing the importance of including people with disabilities in decision-making processes and addressing the high unemployment rate (70-80%) among blind individuals due to lack of accommodations.
- Task force identified a critical need for comprehensive training and education on disability rights, laws, and etiquette for healthcare providers, employers, and emergency responders to address knowledge gaps and improve service delivery.

## Meeting Notes:

### Recap of Previous Meeting

- January meeting focused on provider competency, the first of three priority topics
- Used whiteboard activity and 5 whys approach
- Revealed challenges in training, organizational priorities, and systemic barriers
- Identified lack of specific disability training and awareness of local disability demographics

### Guidelines for Inclusive Meetings

- All written content in chat and whiteboard to be voiced aloud
- Participants encouraged to share thoughts verbally if uncomfortable with writing
- Speakers to introduce themselves before talking and indicate when finished

- Whiteboard used as a visual tool to guide and document discussions
- PDF of updated whiteboard and meeting notes to be available on the website's resources section

## **Communication Barriers Discussion**

### **Lack of Knowledge About Accessibility Needs**

- Chantel emphasized that providers often don't ask individuals with disabilities about their communication needs
- Shared experience with paramedics who didn't directly communicate with her, assuming she couldn't make decisions
- Brandon mentioned medical professionals dismissing patient input, especially regarding medication issues
- Discussion on ableism in the medical community, where providers assume their knowledge supersedes the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities
- Nicole highlighted the need for providers to survey and get feedback from the disability community about their communication needs

### **Digital Divide and Technology Access**

- Dee Grimm raised the issue of the digital divide, particularly affecting elderly individuals who may struggle with internet and social media
- Discussed challenges for those who don't have access to or understanding of online forms and patient portals
- Brandon suggested a loaner program for radios or special equipment to access emergency information
- Noted the importance of maintaining alternative communication methods, such as the 513-241-1010 number for information access

### **Language and Format Barriers**

- Chantel highlighted issues for non-English speakers with disabilities, facing both language and accessibility barriers
- Mentioned the lack of multilingual options on websites and forms
- Discussed the high cost of producing materials in alternative formats, such as Braille menus in restaurants
- Concerns raised about homeless individuals with disabilities facing additional barriers in accessing communication and services

## **Systemic Bias Discussion**

### **Employment Discrimination**

- Chantel shared an experience of being denied a customer service job due to inflexible screen size requirements

- Highlighted the high unemployment rate (70-80%) among blind individuals due to companies' unwillingness to provide accommodations
- Emphasized the need for employers to make reasonable accommodations and understand disability rights laws

### **Implicit Bias and Assumptions**

- Discussion on providers making assumptions about the abilities of individuals with disabilities without asking or understanding their actual capabilities
- Noted that some biases might be subconscious, with providers unaware of their prejudices
- Brandon mentioned issues with outdated scripts or software that become inaccessible, but providers assume they should still work

### **Lack of Representation in Decision-Making**

- Emphasized the importance of inviting people with disabilities "to a seat at the table" for policy and practice decisions
- Suggested the slogan "Where's our seat?" to advocate for inclusion in decision-making processes
- Discussed the fear some individuals with disabilities have about advocating for themselves, worried their needs will be ignored or dismissed

### **Training and Education Gaps**

- Identified lack of training on disability rights, disability law, and disability etiquette as a significant issue
- Mentioned providers' lack of patience in training people with disabilities, expecting everyone to work at the same pace
- Discussed the need for mandatory, free or low-cost training for providers to ensure accessibility and understanding of diverse needs

### **Key Themes Across Topics**

- Persistent lack of understanding and knowledge about diverse communication needs of individuals with disabilities
- Importance of direct communication with individuals rather than caregivers or interpreters
- Need for accessible and diverse communication methods to reach all community members
- Challenges with technology access, cost barriers, and privacy concerns in emergency communication
- Systemic biases deeply rooted in organizational practices, hiring processes, and societal assumptions
- Critical need for education, training, and inclusion of people with disabilities in decision-making processes

## Next Steps

- Information from the meeting to be added to the resource area on the Task Force website
- Continue discussion in the next meeting, focusing on solutions
- Next meeting scheduled for May 13th
- Task force to work on condensing overlapping themes from the three priority areas
- Participants encouraged to provide additional feedback via email if needed

[End of Meeting Minutes]